The Limitations of Dispersive Freedom: Michel Foucault and Historiography

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In this thesis I argue that Foucault's dispersive historiography is a deepening rather than a purifying of historical existence. This emphasis upon dispersion as a critical principle is contrasted with, and delimited by the possibility of the narrative comprehension of historical existence exemplified by the hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur. Insofar as the responsibility to act is an important field where tfphis deepening takes place it cannot be subordinated to the responsibility to otherness which aims at dismantling the action orientated frameworks of traditional ethics and politics. Ricoeur's promotion of narrative refiguration as a response to the aporias of time is thus, a timely rejoinder to dispersive genealogy. I argue further that Foucault's historiography exhibits the productive tension of history as both difference and meaning and that the ethical thrust of such writing is to address the concerns of the present in a way that metamorphosizes rather than challenges the narrative function. Insofar as it connects with the struggles of disenfranchised and marginalized groups, and discourses, it also echoes a powerful element in traditional emancipatory historiography which attempts to fully embrace the slaughtered possibilities of the past

The emancipatory potential of dispersive historiography is examined further by comparison with the aims and values of traditional critical theory. Two positions are delineated: (1) Complementarity, in which genealogy produces valuable insights into hitherto unacknowledged power structures; (2) Delimitation, in which Foucault's work is seen to be an important limitation on the epistemological and ontological interventions of critical theory. This joins the philosophical hermeneutical critique of critical theory in its delimitation of the finite horizon of all emancipatory discourse.

Finally I argue that Foucault's work is itself limited by its refusal to countenance the utopian dimension of social reproduction in which the social imaginary is to be considered not as a delusory projection of desire, but as a driving force behind the projection of freedom. Dispersive freedom sees the formation of political, cultural, and social identities as always constraints upon the real practice of freedom. It is this marginalisation of liberation as a process with ends that I seek to dispute. I conclude that Foucault's dispersive principles are belied by the important contribution his work has made to the necessarily ceaseless task of the refiguration of the concepts of history, freedom, power and truth.

CONTENTS

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Abbreviations.

AK	Foucault, M. The Archaeology of Knowledge. tr. by Sheridan, A. M. (London: Tavistock Publications, 1972).
BC	Foucault, M. The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception. tr. by Sheridan, A. M. (London: Tavistock Publications, 1973).
BSH	Dreyfus, H. L., and Rabinow, P. Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics. (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1982).
BT	Heidegger, M. Being and Time. tr. by Macquarrie, J., and Robinson, E. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962).
DP	Foucault, M. Discipline and Punish. tr. by Sheridan, A. M. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1977).
HHS	Ricoeur, P. Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences. ed. and tr. by Thompson, J. B. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).
HS, 1	Foucault, M. The History of Sexuality: Volume One. tr. by Hurley, R. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1977).
HS, 2	Foucault, M. The History of Sexuality: Volume Two: The Use of Pleasure. tr. by Hurley, R. (New York: Viking, 1986).
IU	Ricoeur, P. Lectures on Ideology and Utopia. ed. by Taylor, G. H. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986)
LCP	Foucault, M. "What is an Author?", in Bouchard, D. F. (ed). Language, Countermemory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews by Michel Foucault. (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1977).
MC	Foucault, M. Madness and Civilization. tr. by Howard, R. (London: Tavistock Publications, 1977).
MFFP	Rajchman, J. Michel Foucault: The Freedom of Philosophy. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).
NGH	Foucault, F. "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History", in Rabinow, P. (ed). The Foucault Reader. (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1986).
OD	Foucault, M. "The Order of Discourse", in Young, R. (ed). Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981).
OT	Foucault, M. The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences. (London: Tavistock Publications, 1971).

PDM — Habermas, J. The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity. tr. by Lawrence, F. G. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987).

PK — Foucault, M. Power/Knowledge. ed. by Gordon, C. (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1980).

PPC — Foucault, M. Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and other Writings of Michel Foucault, 1977-84. ed. by Kritzman, L. W. (London: Routledge, 1988).

TM — Gadamer, H.G. Truth and Method. tr. by Cumming, J., and Barden, G. (London: Sheed and Ward, 1975).

TN,1 — Ricoeur, P. Time and Narrative. Volume One. tr. by McLaughlin, K. and Pellauer, D. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984)

TN,2 — Ricoeur, P. Time and Narrative. Volume Two. tr. by McLaughlin, K. and Pellauer, D. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

TN,3 — Ricoeur, P. Time and Narrative. Volume Three. tr. by McLaughlin, K. and Pellauer, D. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

UDHL — Nietzsche, F. "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life", in Untimely Meditations. tr. by Hollingdale, R. J. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

WE — Foucault, M. "What is Enlightenment?", in Rabinow, P. (ed). The Foucault Reader. (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1986).

Introduction

Dispersion and Comprehension

This is a study of the emancipatory implications of Michel Foucault's dispersive historiographical practice within the framework of a comprehensive understanding exemplified by the work of Paul Ricoeur. In contemporary continental philosophy, Ricoeur has been a master of appropriative understanding[1] that he quite rightly recognizes as standing in a uneasy relationship to the "Hegelian temptation" of total mediation.[2] Ricoeur's own self-understanding of his work is marked by a strong tendency to "comprehend" which he takes to be the guiding feature of narrative interpretation, and which in turn enables a quest for "personal identity that assures the continuity between the potential or inchoate story and the actual story we assume responsibility for." (TN,1,74)[3] Ricoeur's explicit authorial statement at the beginning of Time of Narrative that it forms a pair with his earlier study The Rule of Metaphor (TN,1,ix) contrasts sharply with Michel Foucault's dispersive conception of writing.[4] Foucault's voice is one of unremitting dissemination and his work exemplifies this in its attempt to scatter in different directions the tasks of penetrating the social world. And yet, even when setting up the grandiose machinery of The Archaeology of

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1 Ricoeur in Gadamer's words "never opposes without somehow reconciling". "The Hermeneutics of Suspicion" in Hermeneutics: Questions and Prospects, ed. Gary Shapiro and Alan Sica, (Cambridge: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1984), p. 54.

2 See Paul Ricoeur, Time and Narrative, vol. 3 tr. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1988), chap. 9, (hereafter cited as TN,3) and "Appropriation" in Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences, ed. and tr. J. B. Thompson, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), hereafter cited as HHS.

3 See also p. 142.

4 Foucault's admonition at the start of The Archaeology of Knowledge tr. A Sheridan, (London: Tavistock, 1972) (hereafter cited as AK) is exemplary here: "do you imagine that I would take so much trouble and so much pleasure in writing... if I were not preparing ... a labyrinth into which I can venture, in which I can move my discourse, opening up underground passages, forcing it to go far from itself, finding overhangs that reduce and deform its itinerary, in which I can lose myself and appear at last to eyes that I will never have to meet again. I am no doubt not the only one who writes in order to have no face. Do not ask who I am and do not ask me to remain the same." p. 17.

Knowledge to subsequently leave it as a monolith of its time, Foucault cannot resist telling us, both in the introduction and conclusion, what he is and is not doing. Similarly, what is one to make of Foucault's persistent challenging of his earlier formulations and revision of what he was actually doing in former research?[5] Parallelling these declarations is the willingness to undergo the interrogation and possible fixity of the interview form.[6] It is important to emphasize Foucault's narrativization of his own work in response, not only to his own professed desire for self-effacement, but also to sympathetic commentators who see in this principle of dispersion and singularity the key to his philosophy of freedom in a "post-revolutionary time."[7] What are we to make of these points of reflexivity that hint at hidden desires of authorial control and semi-arrestation of the dispersive/disseminative impulse?

I would suggest that such moments are themselves irruptions of a tension that structures Foucault's work on the level of the will to understand. Foucault never tires of insisting that his work is a response to and intervention in the present. I wish to argue that this can only be understood in an absolutely fundamental sense along the lines of Ricoeur's notion of the "*time of initiative*". (TN,3,207-88) The present is the site where existing self-evidences can be broken up by rendering their production, and hence possibility for destruction,

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[5] See the remarks in the interview "Truth and Power" in Power/Knowledge, ed. Colin Gordon (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1980) p. 115 (hereafter cited as PK) in relation to those in "The Subject and Power" Afterword to Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics, p. 208, (hereafter cited as BSH) Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings of Michel Foucault, 1977-84 ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman, London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 32-3 (hereafter cited as PPC) and "What is Enlightenment?" in The Foucault Reader ed. Paul Rabinow, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986).

[6] It would not be an exaggeration to say that Foucault more than anyone else established this form as an vital element of modern professional philosophy.

[7] John Rajchman, Michel Foucault: The Freedom of Philosophy, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. 50, (hereafter cited as MFFP).

visible. On one level this is profoundly recalcitrant to a reduction of the present to presence. On another level, however, it involves a recognition of the unsurpassability of the present as transition which in Habermas' words has "to be constantly renewed by radical historical thinking" in order to preserve its authenticity.[8] The privilege of the present is preserved in ever complex ways even down to Benjamin's radical desevering of its future-oriented expectations in the "now-time" that "supplies a unique experience with the past".[9] Could we not say that Foucault's present in which he himself is writing history imitates this process of "thinking which suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with tensions" and supplies the "revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past."[10] And here, the unsurpassability of the present as the time of termination and inauguration, of temporary coagulations, is repeated in both the spheres of writing and action.

On the level of reading, this structure is disclosed in the question: 'What does Foucault mean for the present?' where the notion of meaning is not to be reduced to the presentation of authorial intention nor to the fixity of a single use. Nevertheless, the narrativization of Foucault finds its first point of comprehension in this question and one such intention:

> Reading interests me only insofar as it enlists itself into the reality of a contest as an instrument of tactics, of illumination. I would like my books to be, as it were, lancets, or Molotov cocktails, or minefields; I would like them to self-destruct after use, like fireworks.[11]

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[8] Habermas, The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, tr. F. G. Lawrence, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987), p. 13 (hereafter cited as PDM).
[9] Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History" in Illuminations tr. Harry Zohn, (London: Fontana, 1973), Thesis xvi.
[10] Ibid. Thesis xvii.
[11] Michel Foucault, quoted in A. Megill, Prophets of Extremity, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida (Berkeley, London: University of California Press, 1985) p. 243.

Nothing is to be deduced from this other than the possibility of a transformation of the "Foucault effect"[12] from that of dispersion to that of synthesis. This is to say, that a understanding of Foucault in terms of a self-understanding of the present is unavoidable.[13]

Foucault's work as a challenge to our understanding of modernity; as the celebration of the "explosion of man's face in laughter, and the return of masks" and "the scattering of the profound stream of time by which he felt himself carried along" would be necessarily recuperated in the narrative of modernity/ postmodernity.[14] As if to say that the closure of metaphysical humanism sought in the "absolute dispersion of man" that is multiplicity, play and difference is just your story. Yet would this not be the point; that there is no longer the possibility of constructing, let alone deciphering, the supreme plot. With the death of God and his murderer what can the meaning of comprehension be except the weakness of nostalgia? In response to this one might ask whether this does not reinscribe dispersion into the narrative of errancy, into the Nietzschean embarkation: "Woe when you feel homesick for the land as if it had offered more freedom - and there is no longer any 'land'"[15].

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[12] See the preface to the collection of essays in The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality, eds. G. Burchell, C. Gordon, and P. Miller, (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991).

[13] Hayden White suggests that an entry into the "thicket" of Foucault's work is to concentrate on its nature as discourse "and with all the connotations of circularity, of movement back and forth, which the Indo-European root of this term (*kers*) and its Latinate form (*dis-*, 'in different directions', and *currere*, 'to run') suggest." An opening into Foucault through a self-understanding of the present would confirm this notion of circularity. See his essay in Structuralism and Since: From Levi-Strauss to Derrida, ed. with an Introduction by John Sturrock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 82.

[14] Michel Foucault, The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences (London: Tavistock Publications), p. 385. (hereafter cited as OT) see also Alan D. Schrift, "Foucault and Derrida on Nietzsche and the End(s) of 'Man'", in Exceedingly Nietzsche: Aspects of Contemporary Nietzsche Interpretation, eds. David Farrell Krell and David Wood (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 131-149.

[15] F. Nietzsche, The Gay Science, tr. Walter Kaufman, (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), p. 124.

Ricoeur would answer the aporetics of time (the necessity of dispersion and of entropy) with the poetics of narrative and in so doing institutes a particular narrative about the ultimate dissolution that time brings to all such attempts.[16] Here the circularity involved does not seem to me to be one of nostalgia for order but of a genuine impossibility of going beyond such telling. Consider Nietzsche's fable of the fable of the invention of knowledge as "the most arrogant and mendacious moment of universal history: but only a moment. Nature took but a few breaths and the star grew cold; and the clever animals had to die." in 'On Truth and Falsehood in an Extra-Moral Sense'.[17] And what of the fable of "How the 'Real World' at last Became a Myth"[18] as a closure of the possibility of describing either the apparent or the real world? The notion that there might be always something more to say is a deeply seductive one, not least because its limits (death, meaninglessness) are necessarily constitutive of it. The suspicion that this merely repeats the drive to order and the desire for ontological security at a deeper level is correct but is immediately narratively recuperated (may we not just as well say transgressed) as a limit. The possibility of a conceptual reversal here, in which narrative comprehensive is characterized as a transgression, in the sense of a violent interpretation upon the absolutely unformed, should alert us to the metaphysical conceptualization of the dialectic between consonance and dissonance being employed.

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16 See the conclusion to TN,3. See also David Wood, The Deconstruction of Time (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1991), p. 360.

17 F. Nietzsche, "On Truth and Falsehood in an Extra-Moral Sense", quoted in R. J. Hollingdale, Nietzsche (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), p. 130.

18 F. Nietzsche, Twilight of the Idols and The Anti-Christ, tr. R. J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), p. 40.

In these impossibly general terms it is not difficult to conceive of Ricoeur's magisterial meditation (and ultimately narrative comprehension) upon time and narrative as an implicit response to the poststructural and postmodern destabilization of metaphysical conceptual pairings such as presence/absence, identity/difference, being/becoming and especially the radical destructuring of the linear connection past, present, future. The degree of this implicitness is of course debatable. A statement such as "Perhaps in spite of everything, it is necessary to have confidence in the call for concordance" (TN,2,28). is shot through with "the lyrical figure of the lament" (TN,3,273) and sets his voice firmly against the end of narrative and the rule of advertising and resists the notion that "*Drifting is in itself the end of all critique*"[19]. From a postmodern perspective the "nostalgia of the whole"[20] is not far from the surface of Ricoeur's meditative thinking. If one feels the abandoning of the Hegelian desire as a "wound" rather than a healing or a dance outside the cave, it is not surprising that a lyricism of lament permeates the hermeneutics of historical consciousness. Might one not say that it is the narrative urge to condition time rather than time's implacability or the nonmastery of thrownness that really produces this grief requiring "the courage of the work of mourning"? (TN,3,206)

Understood as a self-understanding of the present, the motivation for the simple dichotomy of Foucault as dispersive and Ricoeur as comprehensive is to be seen as the finite opening of a narrative. This

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[19] J. F. Lyotard, Driftworks, ed. Roger McKeon [New York: Semiotext(e), 1984] p. 13. See also Walter Benjamin, "The Story-teller", in Illuminations.

[20] J. F. Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, tr. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 81.

narrative does not take as its beginning a particular historical conjuncture that one might want to argue the West finds itself at, whether this be defined in terms of 'late capitalism', the 'postmodern', or an unfinished modernity. Rather it is an opening that takes the narrative impulse itself as being subject to the dialectic of the Same and Different. All narratives repeat the opening of disclosure which itself cannot escape the closure inherent in any such act, and which is why there will always be something more to say. It is with this belief that a complete self-understanding of the present is impossible that two narratives about the present state of philosophy and of history serve as a limited opening to an understanding of Foucault and Ricoeur as dispersive and comprehensive responses to an always difficult present self-understanding.

Chapter 1

Two Narratives: The End of History and the End of Foundations

(i) Reflexivity: Between Foundationalism and Anti-Foundationalism

A persuasive narrative of philosophical endeavour can be found in Richard Bernstein's book Beyond Objectivism and Relativism. Bernstein argues that philosophy throughtout the twentieth century, has been coming to terms with the desire to found, to reach the Archimedian principle that will ground its endeavours.[1] According to Bernstein, throughout the history of philosophy the metaphors of grounding, foundations, the right method for philosophy etc. have taken prominence. These metaphors are now, however, becoming less compelling for the continuation of a thinking that might bear the name of philosophy. Bernstein argues that there are "many signs that the deep assumptions, commitments, and metaphors that have shaped these oppositions... (between objectivism and relativism) are being called into question."[2] In his latest book The New Constellation, this argument is fleshed out further by an attempt to explore the ethical and political dimensions of thinkers he had not addressed earlier such as Heidegger, Derrida and Foucault. Such thinkers exemplify the pervasive "mood" of "modernity/postmodernity", "which is amorphous, protean, and shifting but which nevertheless exerts a powerful influence on the ways in which we think, act, and experience."[3] Bernstein argues that such thinkers came to see that the ethical-political consequences of their thinking were paramount, an attitude that can be pithily expressed in the Socratic question, 'How should one live?' There might not be such a grand exodus from certain philosophical values after all!

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1 R. J. Bernstein, Beyond Objectivism And Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, And Praxis (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983).
2 Ibid. p. 2
3 R J. Bernstein, The New Constellation (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), p. 11.

'How should one live?' is certainly not a minor question subordinate to those grand philosophical questions: 'What can one know?', 'What am I?', 'What is the meaning of Being?', 'Where and who are we at this particular time in history?' and so on. Rather as the reference to Socrates indicates it is perhaps as old as Western philosophy. What is important here is that the ethical-political constellation that Bernstein finds to be emerging in the writings of thinkers such as Lyotard, Rorty, Habermas and those mentioned above, is hardly a rupture from the tradition. Certainly it would be hard to find a declaration that this is the case in their writing even if at times their rhetoric verges close to this position in recognition of the desire to stand outside of the tradition.[4] This impossible relationship/distance with/from philosophy conceived of as an exclusionary, totalising rationalism or as a metaphysics or logocentrism is explicitly articulated by Derrida when he argues that:

> There is no sense in doing without the concepts of metaphysics in order to attack metaphysics. We have no language - no syntax and no lexicon - which is alien to this history; we cannot utter a single deconstructive proposition which has not already slipped into the form, the logic and the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contest.[5]

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[4] For all his posturing about "the death of man" and the coming to end of philosophy in our day in The Order of Things, Foucault never quite detaches himself from the preeminently traditional process of commentary on the classics of philosophy as attested by his late meditation upon Kant's text "*Was ist Aufklärung?*" in relation to his own work. See "What is Enlightenment" in The Foucault Reader, ed. Paul Rabinow (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984) (hereafter cited as WE.

[5] J. Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" in Writing and Difference, tr. A. Bass, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), p. 280. See also Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles, tr. Barbera Harlow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).

The point to this focusing upon the status of the question 'How should one live?' as Bernstein's chosen summation of the theme of the "new constellation" is not just to recognise that it is not in fact so new to philosophy but to bring out the problems of characterising one's thought as an escape or division from the tradition. It is true that Bernstein characterises the new intellectual and cultural matrix as a move beyond the vagaries of the debate between objectivists and relativists and seems to be suggesting that we have at last started to free ourselves from the constraints of the old paradigms of philosophy that emerged from its prevalent notions of centre, foundation, and grounding. At once, however, we are alerted to the tone implied in the "at last" that structures Bernstein's own narrative of philosophical desire. The metaphor of therapeutic release not only echoes the mood of optimistic certainty that accompanies the setting of philosophy on the royal road to science, it positively repeats its desire. A 'true outsider' to philosophy might just as easily be sceptical of Bernstein's prescriptive narrative that the present shows strong signs of a need to move beyond objectivism and relativism and more importantly, question whether the empirical fact that because the foundations of philosophy have not been conclusively reached this implies that we should stop seeking. Indeed there is an irony involved in the call to renege the quest for groundings, because the model that reoccupies its space is heavily dependent upon an understanding of the tradition of philosophy as a living one. Moreover, this understanding has a tendency to substitute the master names of such groundings with the actual task that is always on the way and that is, in its desire at least, considered to be uniform throughout philosophical history. This move beyond is further characterised as a "new conversation" in order to dampen down any ideas that it defines itself as a total break with the past.

Ultimately, the force of what Bernstein wishes to say comes from his use of the word "beyond", signifying at least a desire to be free of and outside of the "Cartesian anxiety" that requires a foundation for knowledge and life. We are no longer to be guided by this desire which has hitherto been incapable of satisfaction and presumably will always remain so. Bernstein has something important to say about the ethical and political thrust of his chosen philosophers, this is that their reasons for doubting the project of grounding philosophy, knowledge, and language all led to precisely the emphasis upon ethico-political matters. It is as if only a contact with the temptations of metaphysics and a working through such temptations brings one to the promised land of freedom from its unrealizable goals. This of course all happens at a certain remove from the everyday life of the majority of people. Freedom from the desire to ground one's philosophy comes only through the labour of philosophy, through precisely the attempt to ground it. Paradigmatic cases of this are now even part of philosophical tradition and myth.[6]

Freedom from foundations and the desire for necessary truths here functions in its own way as a necessary point of departure for the real matter of living well. Anything less than an understanding of human

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[6] For example, Wittgenstein comes to see that he had been held captive by the picture theory of language in formulating the Tractatus logico-philosophicus, tr. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinesss (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961) and gives up his self-induced solitude from philosophy in order to produce the anti-foundationalist Philosophical Investigations, tr. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1972). Heidegger distances himself from the fundamental ontology in Being and Time, tr. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967), (hereafter cited as BT) because of its assimilation into a foundational anthropology and signals his dissatisfaction with his great work through the designation of a turning (*Kehre*) in his hermeneutical exploration of the question of the meaning of Being from an existential analytic to a meditation upon the happening of language.

being as precisely the kind of being whose Being is an issue for it in Heidegger's felicitous formulation, simply will not do.[7] Anti-foundationalism as an existential project means that no form of life can be grounded but more than this its ethical or political thrust is to claim that the attempt to do so is deeply self-deceiving about the human condition. If no form of life can be grounded in a philosophical (that is metaphysical) way then it is pertinent to ask why forms that do claim such grounds are rendered inferior to those that do not. For this is more than an argument about the importance of deep reflection about the possible justification for one's life or for that matter the importance of such reflection as a prerequisite for living well. Ultimately, it is an argument that renders such meta-reflection about different life forms unnecessary because impossible to adjudicate and thus an argument for the radically situated and finite process of living well. This understanding of existence will be compromised if an appeal to an ahistorical foundation to living well is made simply because nothing (at least in philosophy) has been found to satisfy such an appeal amongst its community.

This may seem to be an argument that short-circuits the philosophical drive to question by introducing a conflict between two forms of life and representing them as alternative philosophical moves when one in fact is not philosophical, but this is precisely the point here. For all their claims to be beyond traditional philosophical desires it could be quite as easily argued that it is the anti-foundationalists who are bewitched by the philosophical game whilst theological foundationalists, for example, are beyond its call. Certainly this would entail a reevaluation of the claim that the history of metaphysics has been a

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[7] See BT,24

series of (mis)-interpretations of Being or that philosophy is simply logocentrism. In contrast to theology, philosophy might be conceived of as at least a long detour that even if it does end up reproducing the framework of a theology (maybe as an inevitable consequence of the decision for philosophy) opened up other possibilities along the way. There would be a case for arguing that it is precisely the way in philosophy that is important and not the end, the questions it raises and not the answers it may supply. In this sense philosophy as a vigilance against the dangers of the privileging of presence and search for foundations would at least carry its own residue of transcendentalism in that it privileges the flight from security and groundedness as the more authentic response to existence.

This reflexivity is inevitable and is a theme that Derrida, for example, will constantly circle around making the point that its inescapability is not to be decried but to be celebrated as the condition for the freedom that occurs through the loss of security when one gives up the desire for presence. The difficulty arises when one is prepared to characterise this position as authentic in contrast to the inauthentic response of constructing metaphysical houses to dwell within. For Derrida himself rightly points out the dangers that reside in Heidegger's thinking about Being and its metaphors of proximity and the "values of neighbouring, shelter, house, service, guard, voice, and listening."[8] The desire to guard oneself against the dangers of slipping back into metaphysics, to attempt an eternal vigilance against the possibility of finding oneself once more upon the philosophical terrain, can be construed not as a setting up camp at a distance from philosophy, but as an intensification

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8 J. Derrida, "The Ends of Man" in Margins of Philosophy, tr. A. Bass, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), p. 130

of the philosophical ethos. This is not just the danger of reappropriation or the impossibility of contesting metaphysics from outside its *logos*. Rather it is a reading of anti-foundationalism that sees it as an integral moment in the history of philosophy and not just a passage taken on the way to secure presence. This is quite in keeping with Derrida's own declaration that deconstruction does not invert and therefore privilege the lower term of the hierarchies it attends to. It would be mere metaphysics to set anti-foundationalism up as the higher term in the couplet foundationalism/anti-foundationalism. Although this is the instinctive move to make, the aim of a strategy such as deconstruction is to question the necessity of such conceptual pairings in the first place. This would all be very well except the intractable problem they force upon us is not erased with the erasure of the terms.[9] Not at least for now. It is all very well Nietzsche proclaiming that we have not been able to do without God because of a certain belief in grammar, but the reflexivity of his own position remains caught in similar problems at least on one level. That is, even his purported leaving behind of philosophy and dance outside of its house is prone to the risk of recuperation, and perhaps necessarily so if it is to succeed in its aims. The attempt to stand outside of the opposition foundationalism/anti-foundationalism might for the present be considered a highly dangerous strategy. If Bernstein's hunch is right, and there really is a move away from foundational thinking, then it might be argued that the philosophical labour that is required for the near future cannot afford to do away with the constellation of concepts that have to some extent also given birth to a certain desire to be free of them.

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[9] For a discussion of this problem see David Wood, "Derrida and the Paradoxes of Reflection" in The Deconstruction of Time (Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press International, 1989), pp. 279-291

Once again one is reminded of Derrida's warnings about trying to shake metaphysics from a site completely outside of its concepts and strategies. Anti-foundationalism might be considered a strategy here in much the same way that Derrida intends his chain of 'names' for the processes of deconstructive thinking and yet like such names be at risk of restoration to the philosophical hall of fame. The fact that scepticism has belonged to philosophy almost from the outset, as both a certain process of thinking and a certain movement that one could profess sympathy if not allegiance with has hardly detracted from its power to begin anew, not only the project of metaphysics, but also the project of overcoming metaphysics. Anti-foundationalism's family resemblance with scepticism underlines its complicity with the philosophical game even whilst professing a certain distance from what are seen as the fundamental desires that initiate that game. It is here that anti-foundationalism can be guilty of essentialism if it does so portray philosophy as springing from the desire for security and firm groundings. Such a uni-thematic characterisation just does not do justice to the manifold well-springs of philosophy. Even as classically told within the tradition, philosophy is said to spring from wonder and not just the kind of wonder that is the desire to know.[10]

So far I may seem to have been skimming over the concrete issues that are at stake in Bernstein's representation of the current mood of at least an important section of the philosophical community. What have

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[10] This is how George Steiner chooses to summarize the thrust of Heidegger's work for instance: "Martin Heidegger is the great master of astonishment, the man whose amazement before the blank fact that we *are* instead of *not being*, has put a radiant obstacle in the path of the obvious." Such a characterisation of the seminal 'de-structor' of Western philosophy as the history of presence is hardly surprising but can it seriously be declared that there is no genealogy of this attitude to be traced entwined with the alleged 'real' business of philosophy. G. Steiner, Heidegger (London: Fontana, 1978), p. 150.

such general dialectical remarks to do with the specifics of an ethics or politics that he claims to be emerging in the new conversation? Whilst anti-foundationalism may have enormous consequences for the way we might perceive the constructs of human civilization, in what sense would it lead to a change in our relation to ethics or politics? It is for instance, possible that it would have little effect on the present way one lives their life. In some sense this consequence is to be found in one of the most prominent anti-foundationalists, Richard Rorty. This is an interpretation Cornel West gives of his neo-pragmatism which on the "macrosocietal level" simply leaves much of the values of bourgeois humanism in place whilst on the "microinstitutional level" it has "immense anti-professional implications for the academy".[11] For West:

> Rorty's historicist sense remains too broad, too thin - devoid of the realities of power; his ethnocentric posthumanism is too vague, too nonchalant - and unmindful of the decline of liberalism. Furthermore, Rorty's demythologizing of philosophy seems to retreat into the philosophical arena as soon as pertinent sociohistorical issues are raised.[12]

Certainly it is easy to see Rorty's faith that "truth and justice lie in the direction marked by the successive stages of European thought"[13] as calling for little change in what he deems the central moral values of European intellectual life. So returning to the charge of abstraction in my appraisal so far of Bernstein's new conversation, the point would be that such a conversation is precisely itself constantly in danger of abstraction and hence of inconsequentiality to politics, economics, and the social world. In West's words what is required is to:

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11 Cornel West, "The Politics of American Pragmatism" in Post-Analytic Philosophy, ed. by John Rajchman and Cornel West (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. 267.
12 Ibid, p. 268.
13 R. Rorty, Consequences of Pragmatism (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982), p. 173.

> pursue thick, i.e., social and heterogeneous, historical accounts for the emergence, development, sustenance, and decline of vocabularies and practices in the natural and human sciences against the background of dynamic changes in specific (and often coexisting) modes of production, political conflicts, cultural configurations, and personal turmoil.[14]

Recognition that one can not stand outside of the concepts of metaphysics in order to challenge its strategies, motives and privilegings leaves one peculiarly prone to the dangers of leaving everything as it is. This does not have to be the case. One important response to Derrida's deconstructive strategies, (in the sense of their political effects) has been to argue that it precisely does leave everything as it is, being concerned only with texts. This is a response that is to be found both in certain instantiations of deconstructive practice as well as in criticism of it for example, by Marxists. It is surely not part of Derrida's 'intention' to leave everything as it is, but to make a difference to political practice (though how one is to interpret the notion of 'intention' here is itself fraught with difficulty). Just what this might be is not easily defined and this itself is an intrinsic condition of a strategy that is ceaselessly on the move. That it is necessary to at least continually attempt to understand how a 'deconstructive politics' might operate and articulate what difference it would make institutionally is nevertheless an imperative. As Terry Eagleton asks:

> Is 'deconstructing' an institution just a more modish name for traditional forms of socialist transformation, or does it imply practical strategic differences?[15]

If, from Eagleton's perspective, the encounter between Marxism and Deconstruction is still to come (or at least be fully developed) it is

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[14] Cornel West, "The Politics of American Pragmatism" Ibid. p. 269.
[15] T. Eagleton, "Fréres Jacques: The Politics of Deconstruction" in Against the Grain (London: Verso, 1986), p. 87.

around West's declaration of what is required to supplement Rorty's fierce pragmatism that one way forward might be found. The "thick, social and heterogeneous, historical accounts" that he proposes might enable a point where deconstructive concerns with texts and discourse and Marxist concerns with material conditions and practices can produce theoretical work with political effect. This strategy at first seems plausible. What could be more enlightening than historical work upon where we have come from and where we are now as a response to our new found anti-foundationalism? The difficulty is that this response has serious problems if it proceeds unreflectively (not least if the 'we' here goes unchallenged). It is all very well arguing that what is required is the ceaseless practice of history as the appropriate response to the dissolution of eternal truths, but far from being a given, history is itself a problematical and shifting concept, and necessarily so within the bounds of anti-foundationalism.

(ii) Foucault and the Decentring of Western History

This questioning of the giveness of the practice of history is something that structuralism and poststructuralism has placed firmly on the agenda. My second point of departure for an understanding of the work of Foucault is Robert Young's argument that postmodernism is a "certain self-consciousness about a culture's own historical relativity... (which) also involves the loss of the sense of an absoluteness of any Western account of History."[16] He argues that:

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[16] Robert Young, White Mythologies: History, Deconstruction and the West (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 19.

> the suggestion that structuralism and poststructuralism have denied history is a persuasive one which now has wide currency. Such an argument, in implying that the problem is simply a question of the lack of history or of its presence, as if history were some undifferentiated entity that could just be added or taken away, stepped into or got out of, skates over the fact that the real question has always focused on the much more difficult issue of what kind of history, and of what status can be accorded to historical thought. The reproach that poststructuralism has neglected history really consists of the complaint that it has questioned History.[17]

Young points out that attempts to account for poststructuralism in terms of the "aftermath of May '68 seem positively myopic" and that one should see it as an "active critique of the Eurocentric premises of Western knowledge" and thus part of the wider "sense of the loss of European history and culture as History and Culture, the loss of their unquestioned place at the centre of the world" which has increased apace with the advent of postcolonialism.[18]

The difference with Rorty's assessment of Western culture could not be more pronounced. Rorty does not take the loss of centre and ground as cause for concern about the value of "the conversation of Europe" and ultimately sees it as a positive space for its celebration free of angst about the need for justification. Young, on the other hand, sees it as important precisely as a decentralization and decolonization of European thought that might lead to a respect for the radically Other rather than just the Other constituted by the processes of European colonialism. Young does not wish to present an alternative practice of history but by arguing that the "conditions of history's possibility are also its conditions of impossibility" and showing this through an appraisal of a number of theoretical interventions in the field, come to a different

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17 Ibid. p. 23
18 Ibid. p. 19-20

understanding and a different framework for thinking about history. It is the theoretical perplexities that the writing of history presents that are themselves productive and point to its possible political and ethical importance:

> From Sartre to Foucault history has repeatedly emerged as a contradictory concept, both totalizing and detotalizing, essentialist and non-essentialist. Such contradictions can be productive: the attempt to reject historicism absolutely results either in an utter particularism or in a surreptitious return of historicism in a different form. Only an understanding that recognizes that an irresolvable tension works within the historical schema itself will be in a position to make its contradictory claims productive.[19]

Young argues that even the work of master theoreticians of history such as Althusser and Sartre powerfully illustrate this tension. Borrowing from Merleau-Ponty one might say that the most important lesson history teaches us is the impossibility of a complete History and that history is a process that has to be repeated indefinitely.[20] How one understands and comes to terms with this situation is itself dependent upon historical factors. If history is understood as an economy of totalization and recuperation, then this situation will be considered a failure. However, the impossibility of closure and resulting interminability of interpretation that irrupts from this can be taken as a positive condition of 'freedom' to be affirmed and celebrated. This productive tension would become apparent in the work of historians who let themselves be immersed in its undecidability. This is at least what Young considers to be the case, and he takes it not as a sign of failure but of intellectual honesty and

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19 Ibid. p. 83

20 "The most important lesson... the reduction teaches us is the impossibility of a complete reduction." Maurice Merleau-Ponty, The Phenomenology of Perception, tr. C. Smith (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), preface.

theoretical insight. In contrast to Peter Dews' negative appraisal of Foucault's shifting perspectives, for example, he argues that:

> With respect to history, the vacillations of Foucault's writing enact the impossibility of its simultaneous finitude and infinitude, the irresolvable conflict between history as meaning and history as difference, between history as a teleology and eschatology and history as the event, as finitude and mortality. Here we encounter the recognition that at a conceptual level the idea of history cannot be taken further: rather it can only be addressed through a tension in the writing itself.[21]

Once again one is reminded of Derrida's caution about any attempt to stand outside of metaphysics in order to criticise it. Even though history may well be peculiarly susceptible to bourgeois humanist values such as continuity, identity, and totality and in turn complicit with European colonialism, it is not suggested that one simply renounce history as guilty until proven innocent. That the writing of the history of the relations between colonialism and the rise of historiography is replete with difficulties and self-reflexivity is not an argument for its wholesale rejection. It is, however, a situation that presents one with the necessity for the utmost vigilance as to the effects of that writing. It also presents a constant reminder that similar desires for totality, identity and security are always as ready to emerge in the discourse of resistance as the discourse of oppression.

What might a counter-history consist of here? Surely not a mere inversion of traditional historical practices; a declaration of absolute discontinuity amongst discrete elements, series, and frameworks, a call for a pristine ahistoricism. This is certainly not the case with Foucault who is often misleadingly portrayed as the philosopher who *founds* his theory of history on discontinuity. (PK, 111-15). Foucault is explicit in

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[21] Ibid. p. 85. See P. Dews, Logics of Disintegration: Post-Structuralist Thought and the Claims of Critical Theory (London: Verso, 1987). p. 234.

his rejection of the "Hegelian skeleton" of dialectics and the reductive movement of a "semiology" based upon communication and dialogue. The model he puts forward in the interview "Truth and Power", for instance, he believes steers a path between the Scylla of a pure structuralism that evacuates the event from history and the Charybdis of a purely event constituted history. This is a "recourse to analyses in terms of the genealogy of relations of force, strategic developments, and tactics" in which the:

> history which bears and determines us has the form of a war rather than that of a language: relations of power, not relations of meaning. History has no 'meaning', though this is not to say that it is absurd or incoherent. On the contrary, it is intelligible and should be susceptible of analysis down to the smallest detail - but this in accordance with the intelligibility of struggles, of strategies and tactics. (PK,114)

At a cursory glance, Foucault might be seen to be exchanging one master framework (that of dialectical or teleological progress) for another, that might be said to be embodied by the master signifier 'power'. Just what is this "form of a war" and could not history cease to take this form even if it does take such a form presently? It is noteworthy that Foucault defines his own particular brand of history against that of history which has a single grand 'Meaning'. It might be argued that such a conception of history is an easily criticisable target and one that has been largely discredited during the twentieth century. What Foucault has primarily in mind, however, is history that proceeds always as a totalising mechanism in which a transcendental consciousness is able to represent the past as leading inexorably to the present[22]

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[22] See the especially the introduction to AK.

The denial that history could have a multiplicity of incommensurable meanings does not rest necessarily upon the notion that it has to have a single meaning, however. It could consist of an argument that ultimately there can only be one true meaning of history but that this may never present itself because of the historicity itself of history. In this sense the possibility of there being one true understanding of history is based upon the possibility of a viewpoint from outside of history. That this would be something like God's perspective automatically marks the discrepancy between such a history and human history. What it might mean to take God's absolute viewpoint as a regulative ideal for historiography is a question that perhaps only helps in an understanding of the limits of human and hence finite history. This has not prevented theoretical attempts to circumvent this discrepancy, however. This is certainly the thrust of, for example, Marxist versions of history (especially those, might we not say all here, heavily influenced by a Hegelian understanding of history) in which there is one true interpretation of events to be ascertained either by scientific analysis and or by its justification through the future communist society. Such an affirmation of the one true interpretation of history to be confirmed by the future classless society in which history comes to an end, or by the theory of scientific Marxism which distinguishes between ideological (false) and scientific (true) historical interpretation is, like historicism, subject to questions regarding its unwarranted closure of the interpretative process of history. The claim to totalize all meanings whether by a criteria of truth or by the radical levelling of all interpretations is singled out for its own specificity within the conflict of interpretations. On this level the similarities between an objective history and a relative historicist history are seen to be greater than their differences. They might be said, following Bernstein, to be

precisely dependent upon each other. Each works upon the presumption that particular historical meanings or interpretations can be subsumed within a greater meta-historical perspective. For Marxists (or indeed historians working within the tradition of scientific positivism) there is ultimately one true story to be told of the historical record. Historicism, which takes as its premise the idea that every interpretation is a relative truth of its time, privileges its own interpretation of the historical record. This presentism might be thought to be hardly a fault if one is arguing against the notion of a single unified theory of history. A major element of the idea that there can be no complete interpretation of history is the historicity of historical understanding. Historicism in its emphasis upon the interminable production of historical interpretation is thus a theory closer to those who argue against a universal history than objectivist history. This certainly might be the case if one is adamant that to give up the notion of a single true history is to fall prey to the relativism of a radical historicism in which the dominant interpretation of the present holds sway regardless of its cognitive claims. The problem with historicism taken to its logical conclusion, however, is its refusal to theorize the concept of 'history' itself. It is one thing to assert the relativity of all historical interpretations, it is another to problematize the notion of historical understanding itself. Historicism is far too quick to gloss over the problems of the status of historical understanding in favour of its over-inflation into a transcendental category of human life. This is comparable to the notion that history is outside of philosophy or theory and is itself a theoretical stance, usually empiricist. It might be that historians with a objective bent proceeding according to the principle that theory seriously impedes the discovery of the facts are closer to a radical historicism than they would care to admit.

This is precisely Young's point when he argues that one cannot invoke history as a sort of outside, a concrete that remains exterior to theory in much the same way as the 'political' is appealed to in conflicts of theory. That history has always been a problematical concept, and never had an immediate certainty is the reason why in recent years theorists have turned their attention back to the question of the historicity of historical understanding, to its status as interpretation, representation or narrative, and, more radically to the problem of temporality as such.

The most explicit articulation of history's limited status as a form of knowledge comes with Lévi-Strauss' challenge to Sartre. According to Lévi-Strauss, it is precisely Western civilisation's assumption that man can be truly known in a single one of the historical and geographical modes of his existence that reveals how much Western societies are indistinguishable from other cultures. Every culture sets itself up as universal and thus, history, far from constituting a privileged form of knowledge, is simply the myth of modern man, and merely amounts to a particular method of analysis.[23] Lévi-Strauss suggests that as a science anthropology should be attempting not to provide a definition of man as he is known experientially in our own society, but should rather begin by 'dissolving' him as a concept of the experiencing self defined against an other. His argument against Sartre was based upon his universalization of a particular experience of what it is to be human, an existential consciousness dehistoricized into a general foundation for a concept of History.

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[23] See Claude Levi-Strauss, "History and Dialectic" in The Savage Mind (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1966), p. 249

The difficulty with Lévi-Strauss' characterisation of history is that, although it has been inextricably connected to Western culture and been a practice that undeniably provided a theoretical armature for Western imperialism, it has also been in certain theoretical forms at the forefront of a radical undermining of the dominance of the West. This is certainly the case that Young wishes to put forward in his defence of a poststructuralism that courageously struggles with the West's self-consciousness about its historical relativity and questions its very own pretensions to arrive at a secure understanding of the relationship between the possibility/impossibility of history. One might be tempted along with Rorty, to begin to question how radical an undermining of European intellectual values can go when poststructuralism is undeniably a product of such values. One is indeed reminded of Nietzsche's famous depiction of truth that finally dissolves itself after a long career in which "the values we have had hitherto thus draw their final consequence" the necessary "advent of nihilism" and the recognition that there is no truth.[24] Might one not say that the forces cultivated by history have also finally and necessarily turned against its "teleology, its partial perspective."[25] And if this is the case then what is the significance of posing the question 'How should one live?' Does not Nietzsche's project for a genealogy of morals and a revaluation of all values begin to make sense in this light.

Young argues that poststructuralist history is motivated by the quest for the singular, the contingent event which by definition refuses all conceptualization, and that this can be related to the project of constructing a form of knowledge that respects the other without

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[24] F. Nietzsche, The Will to Power, tr. W. Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), p. 4
[25] Ibid. p. 10.

absorbing it into the same. From this Levinasian perspective, the notion that history can be transcendental forms part of the imperialism of the Same in which the totalization aspired to is accomplished only by the appropriation of the Other. History is particularly guilty of this imperialism hence Levinas' declaration that "when man truly approaches the Other he is uprooted from history."[26] This possibility of extrication from history has clearly Messianic overtones; redemption from history's realm of violence comes only from the rupture that the Other represents in an infinite excess. A dialectical view of history that insists there is no possibility of its transcendence would obviously question the desire for absolute Otherness here. Either mankind realises that freedom emerges immanently in the finitude of the here and now or history will go on without us. More provocatively one cannot simply dis-invent the consciousness of history which at the same time is a self-reflexive cognition of itself as a means to change history. Poststructuralism is not simply a 'liquidation of history', however. As we have already seen above, Foucault believes that once the guiding values of traditional history have been questioned the real historical work only just begins. It is this tension between a vigorous critique of all transcendental, teleological and dialectical histories and the attempt to continue writing history at a distance from such theoretical totalizations that I wish to emphasize in the work of Foucault. It is only here that an understanding of the dispersive drive can be productively met by that of comprehension.

It is important to realize that Foucault does not simply question hitherto practices of writing historiography in order to simply propose another

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26 E. Levinas Totality and Infinity (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969) p. 52.

methodology. Rather it is precisely the constant task to articulate the limitations of methodology in order to produce a historiography that aims to be in some sense still 'critical' that constitutes Foucault's 'anti-methodology'. This interminable task is I wish to argue, a necessarily constitutive part of a historiography that seeks to avoid philosophical naivete. I want to argue that this position is itself crucially dependent upon the historicity of historical understanding and the temporal nature of existence. Foucault's anti-methodology has often been described as a transgressive thought, and this is a characterisation he himself to some extent accepted.[27] His histories are produced clearly with the intention of producing a shock of defamiliarisation and attempt to speak from the edge of our framework in order to produce a change in our relation to that framework. In The Archaeology of Knowledge, a work that some might regard as an explicit methodology[28] he sets out this ethos of uncertainty:

> Hence the cautious, stumbling manner of this text: at every turn, it stands back, measures up what is before it, gropes towards its limits, stumbles against what it does not mean, and digs pits to mark out its own path... It is not critical, most of the time; it is not a way of saying that everyone else is wrong. It is rather an attempt to define a particular site by the exteriority of its vicinity;... I have tried to define this blank space from which I speak, and which is slowly taking shape in a discourse that I still feel to be so precarious and so unsure.[29]

It is this constant need to go beyond taken for granted structures of thinking and experience that drove him to categorically distance himself

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[27] See for example Michel Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" and "A Preface to Transgression", in Language, Countermemory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews, ed. by Donald Bouchard, tr. by D. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977) (hereafter cited as LCP).

[28] Alan Megill points out its parodic relationship with Descartes' Discourse on Method in his Prophets of Extremity, p. 228.

[29] AK,17 see also p. 205

from philosophies that derived their impetus from phenomenology. Simply put this was because of what he saw as the entwinement of phenomenology with problems of subjectivity and transcendental constitution that reproduce the problems they seek to overcome.[30] However, Foucault's concern with the problem of the inescapable boundedness of historical understanding immediately suggests a comparison with the work of for example, Gadamer who has developed Heidegger's insights into a major defense of philosophical hermeneutics centred upon the finitude of historicity.[31] Given Foucault's explicit rejection of a certain kind of hermeneutics[32], and his later interest in the practices that constitute the "hermeneutics of the self" it would seem a productive move to ask of his work questions formulated from within such a tradition in order to perhaps delimit the strategies he employs. This is especially the case if one desires not to reduce these strategies to mere "presentism", "relativism" and "cryptonormativism" (PDM, 276) or to see them vitiated by "theoretical incoherence"[33]

Foucault has produced a wide range of reactions in the academic community, something he himself found amusing and pleasurable because of the wide diversity of opinions formed about the meaning of his work.[34] This inability to classify his work in an already known framework, Foucault took to be an indication of his relation to "political

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30 See OT,327-332. See also the article by David Couzens Hoy on Foucault's relationship with modern philosophies of knowledge, "Foucault: Modern or Postmodern?" in After Foucault: Humanistic Knowledge, Postmodern Challenges, ed. Jonathan Arac (New Brunswick, London: Rutgers University Press, 1988), pp. 12-41.

31 See H. G. Gadamer, Truth and Method (London: Sheed and Ward, 1975)

32 That of a depth interpretation that aims at producing a 'true' account which he defines disparagingly as "commentary" in The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception, tr. by A. M. Sheridan (London: Tavistock Publications, 1973) (hereafter cited as BC).

33. P. Dews, Logics of Disintegration, p. 169.

34 Michel Foucault, "Politics, Polemics and Problematizations", in The Foucault Reader, pp. 383-4.

questions". It was the fact that his political attitude was not the result of a critique carried out in the name of the one true method but a questioning of how politics handles that "domain of acts, practices, and thoughts" that pose problems for it, that ensured the restless character of his work.[35] This domain included for Foucault areas such as madness as a limit experience in the constitution of reason, crime and mental illness constituted as 'abnormal behaviour' to be disciplined and ordered by political technologies, and sexuality as a sphere of practice that exceeds political regulation and solution. In this sense, Foucault's statement that he had "never tried to analyze anything whatsoever from the point of view of politics, but always to ask politics what it had to say about the problems with which it was confronted." can be used to understand his relation to the writing of history through a simple substitution of 'history' for 'politics'.[36] The methods of history are to be understood as strategies for circumventing, overcoming, or abolishing the problems it faces in its appropriation of a past that is no longer and in being so theoretically underdetermined is particularly prone to the charge of ideological contamination. How is one to continue writing history once it is apparent that in most of its forms it is subject to suspicion not only for its narrow framework but for the apparently vicious reflexivity it fosters by historicising its own practice?

This reflexivity is not a problem confined to the practice of history, however. It is just as much a condition of sociology for example once it engages upon an examination of its own origins and social production and upon a sociology of knowledge. Philosophically reflexivity has also been a constant preoccupation expressed in the famous early forms of

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35. Id.
36 Ibid. p. 385.

the Cretean liar paradox and the sceptics claim that 'We cannot know anything.' Hilary Lawson has called reflexivity the post-modern predicament which has gained in significance because of the intense concern with language that has accompanied much of twentieth century philosophy. This predicament, according to him, is a crisis of our values and truths because of the "irreducibly textual character of our beliefs" which are "expressed through texts, through language, through sign systems, no longer seen to be neutral."[37] Reflexivity here is associated especially with the work of Nietzsche, Heidegger and Derrida, who have taken the paradoxes of reflexivity to the limit mainly through an intense reflection upon the textual nature of thinking. Just what these thinkers propose as 'living well' in the reflexive condition that they claim to be inescapable is not positively delineated and this is itself a necessary conclusion to be drawn from such a situation. What is clear, however, is that it involves in all three a changed relation to language through a greater understanding of its rhetorical, disclosive, and strategic uses. This greater awareness of the importance of language as the medium for thinking about thinking and its limits has also inevitably emerged within historiographical theory. Here, reflexivity does not just apply to the conclusions to be drawn from the attitude of a radical historicity that relativises its own origin but rather to the essentially narrativist and tropological nature of historiography. Such a theorization of historiography first emerges most clearly in the English speaking world with Hayden White's Metahistory.[38] The stress upon the making or poetics of historiography has become an important strand within its own

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[37] Hilary Lawson, Reflexivity: The Post-modern Predicament (London: Hutchinson, 1985), p. 10.

[38] Hayden White, Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1973).

theorization fed by an increasing philosophical interest in the relations between narrative, history, identity, and human existence.[39]

Much of this narrativist philosophy of history has, of course, been concerned with a justification of the historiographical enterprise in some form or other. Thus, it has not completely severed itself from such notions as the primacy and security of meaning, of history as a discipline, and the connection between historiography as man-made and of history as thus also the creation of 'man' through the mediation of historical understanding. That this is so is partly to be explained through a desire to justify history in the face of perceived radical challenges to its status as wrought by structuralism and poststructuralism. Under the threat of a reduction of history to the 'Western myth' in which the 'effect of reality' is generated by narrative discourse; narrativist philosophers of history have attempted to justify its continuance by arguing for its important existential underpinnings, especially that of human temporality. This is especially the case with Ricoeur's Time and Narrative which revolves around the thesis that:

> between the activity of narrating a story and the temporal character of human experience there exists a correlation that is not merely accidental but that presents a transcultural form of necessity. To put it another way, *time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence.* (TN,1,52)

Narrativity here, is the meaningful representation of human beings in time, and Ricoeur believes that far from refuting this project, anti-narrative historiography as developed by the French *Annales* school or by poststructuralists such as Foucault, contributes to a deepening and

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39 For example, see David Carr, Time, Narrative and History (Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986)

broadening of the sense of human temporality and its representation. This is a thesis that is characteristic of Ricoeur's desire to synthesize heterogeneous traditions and is commendable if only for being suspicious of the blanket linkage between structuralism, poststructuralism and ahistoricism. Behind this desire to appropriate diverse traditions and understand the drive to fragmentation lies a deeper belief in the potentiality of historical understanding to enrich human experience. This itself is born of a belief that the replies of narrative to the aporias of time are not simply consolatory lies in the face of death and the dispersion of existence but positive responses "to think more and to speak differently." (TN,3,274) Ricoeur's own reflections upon historiography stand within the oscillation of "the invincible suspicion that fictions lie and trick insofar as they console, and the equally invincible conviction that fictions are not arbitrary insofar as they answer a need of which we are not the masters, the need to put the seal of order on chaos, of sense on non-sense, of concord on discord" and exemplify from a different tradition, White's commendation of the tension of historical theory. (TN,2,27)

It might be fair to say, however, that taken to its logical conclusion, the theory that historiography does not depend upon a relation to a external and neutrally verifiable past, has also provoked narrativist thinkers to the equal conviction that history can only function as a de-sublimation of the chaos of the past.[40] Another defender of historiography's essential narrative textuality, F. R. Ankersmit, is equally concerned to question the notion that there can be one true view of the past. On the

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40. Hayden White, "The Politics of Historical Interpretation: Discipline and De-Sublimation" in The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation (Baltimore London: John Hopkins University Press, 1987).

contrary, he argues that, if there is just one view of the past then there is no view because it is only the multiplicity of perspectives produced by historian's narratives that enable an appreciation of any one specific perspective.[41] Within the confines of what could be called the 'narrative turn' in historiography it might be thought that the crucial issue revolves around the adequacy of a historiography that is conscious of its own conventionalism to represent the past. This of course would be a false demand because the notion of representational adequacy has no place within an understanding of historiography as always a perspectival 'seeing' or in Ankersmit's words as "comparable to a belvedere" in which "The statements of a narratio may be seen as instrumental in our attaining a 'point of view' like the steps of the staircase of a belvedere, but what we ultimately see comprises much more of reality than what the statements themselves express."[42] Instead of representational adequacy being the crucial issue it is rather the moral and political uses of history that are at the base of recent enquiries into narrative. This is certainly where it joins the poststructuralist critique of history as an ideological practice. The differences to be found amongst anti-realist theorists as divergent as Ricouer and Foucault may be considered insignificant in relation to the realist and empiricist tendencies of much professional historiography. That there are differences between them is where the important work begins.

That Foucault resists the desire to seek an origin, *telos* or transcendental subject which would centre history is quite clear. What is often not so manifest is that thinkers working from within the

41 See F. R. Ankersmit, Narrative Logic: A Semantic Analysis of the Historians Language (The Hague, 1983), p. 240.
42 Ibid. p. 223.

phenomenological-hermeneutical tradition, such as Gadamer and Ricoeur, also are at pains to resist this Hegelian temptation in the thinking of history and that it is precisely this temptation, that like Foucault's reaction-formation to phenomenology in his own work, is the sign under which their thinking proceeds in a process of constant disengagement. Following a question that Bernstein asks of the thought of Gadamer, Habermas and Rorty in the context of an exploration of the common ground he finds in their "non-foundational pragmatic humanism", I would like to ask what is the difference that makes a difference between the work of Foucault, Habermas, and Ricoeur?[43] That this question automatically takes up residence in a style of thought that Ricoeur and Gadamer have both enthusiastically endorsed, that of an open-ended dialogical encounter and the spirit of a critical appropriation of other traditions in a hermeneutical fusion of horizons, will immediately alert one to a certain domestication or tranquillizing of the work of Foucault. That this is a complete misreading of the provocation of Foucault is itself something that makes no sense if one is to take seriously his own challenge to the disciples and commentators of Nietzsche:

> Nietzsche's contemporary presence is increasingly important. But I am tired of people studying him only to produce the same kind of commentaries that are written on Hegel or Mallarmé. For myself, I prefer to utilise the writers I like. The only valid tribute to thought such as Nietzsche's is precisely to use it, to deform it, to make it groan and protest. And if commentators then say that I am being faithful or unfaithful to Nietzsche, that is of absolutely no interest.[44]

For Nietzsche one might substitute Foucault. If one is then to argue that the point of Foucault's own prescriptions is to call for a use of

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[43] See Bernstein's essay "What is the Difference that Makes a Difference? Gadamer, Habermas, and Rorty" in Philosophical Profiles (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1986).

[44] Michel Foucault, "Prison Talk in PK, 53-4.

Nietzsche that necessarily goes beyond mere doctrinal repetition and thus to be critical via a process of disruption and transgression, then one can also claim that the attempt to use his work incorporatively and for a synthetic project is no less "to deform it, to make it groan and protest." I see no problem in interrupting Foucault's own preoccupations and certain constant manner of disruption through what might derogatorily be named a desire for understanding and dialogue. This, however, is a misrepresentation of a hermeneutics of historical consciousness that has given up the constituting subject as master of all meaning and is fractured by its own finitude into an interminable task. The attempt to translate the destabilizing discourse of Foucault into the more conciliatory ethos of historical hermeneutics is quite clearly a violence and disciplining of its attempt to transgress traditional ethical and political reflection. I do not think that it is an unproductive stance to take towards an understanding of the meaning Foucault's work may have for us, if only because it practises a interpretative violence that Foucault himself would acknowledge as inescapable and necessary. Moreover, it is just as questionable to characterize his thought as situated at an absolute distance from the concerns of post-Heideggerian hermeneutics and the ethical and political concerns of the tradition of critical theory. This is particularly apparent in the crucial text "What is Enlightenment?" where he is at pains to defend his own philosophical approach against the "blackmail" of the Enlightenment by appealing to that most modern of philosophers Kant. Foucault's relation and challenge to the presuppositions of critical theory as, for example, most comprehensively articulated by Habermas, is something that many have found productive.[45] This productive

[45] See H. L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, "What is Maturity?" in Foucault: A Critical Reader, ed. David Couzens Hoy (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986) and J. Rajchman, Michel Foucault: The Freedom of Philosophy.

relationship, no doubt stems from Foucault's genealogical unmasking of the human sciences and concern with the workings of power. Thomas McCarthy refers to him as Habermas' "preferred partner" in his "'dialogue'(?) with French poststructuralism".[46] This purported dialogue is certainly of importance but perhaps one can say that its real importance from the perspective of dispersion, lies in the impossibility of the exchange between the two positions ever forming an expanded and comprehensive notion of reason.[47]

In one sense this is to endorse the Foucauldian understanding of reason as necessarily formed through exclusionary and dividing practices, most notably the oppositions between reason and madness and truth and falsity, and its inextricable connection to power.[48] Being able to orient oneself productively in the tension that is generated by this impossibility of completed dialogue is something that can be practised by bringing to bear upon it the insights of the hermeneutics of Ricoeur and Gadamer. This bringing to bear is not intended to be a encompassment of the tension in a Hegelian synthesis but rather to argue for the

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46 See Thomas McCarthy's, translator's Introduction to The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, p. xiv.

47. Habermas' fear of Foucault's indictment of Western reason and his worry that it mystifies modern experiences is rooted in his fear that such claims were also the breeding ground for National Socialism and thus partly explains his skewed characterisation of it as Neoconservative. "For that is what this radical criticism of reason in effect amounts to, with its fabulation of pre-civilizational states. We have had all that, in Germany, so immediately at hand that you can smell it ever afterwards: the artificial mystification of something so close into something supposedly so primordial." "Life-forms, Morality and the Task of the Philosopher" in Habermas: Autonomy and Solidarity: Interviews with Jürgen Habermas, ed. Peter Dews (London: Verso, 1986), p. 203. See also his essay "Neoconservative Culture Criticism in the United States and West Germany: An Intellectual Movement in Two Political Cultures" in Habermas and Modernity, ed. and with an Introduction by Richard J. Bernstein (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1985).

48 See Michel Foucault "The Order of Discourse" in Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader ed. Robert Young (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 52-6, (hereafter cited as OD).

necessity of the "bad infinite" in critical thought, what might be termed by poststructuralism as 'transgression' or by critical theory as a 'fallibilist conception of truth.'[49] The suspicion that what the name 'hermeneutics' designates is a recovery of meaning and a profound strategy of nostalgia which perhaps can only be cured by a certain practice of live burial is a suspicion that I do not share. Rather it is precisely as a 'hermeneutics of suspicion' in which there is a tendency towards uncovering deep meaning or structures beneath the surface of practices that its strategies are wedded to a certain nostalgia.[50] Once one gives up this notion of a hermeneutics of suspicion there is still room for a practice of interpretation that "grows out of pragmatic concerns and has pragmatic intent" and that, although it has limited pretensions about complete understanding can continue to foster strategies of how to go on that are not simply repetitions of the Same.[51] It is in this context that the problems faced in the writing of history can be productive in understanding the dilemmas of critique. If one agrees with the early Heidegger in assigning a primacy to the future in understanding historical existence (and this is a big if insofar as it is bound up with his understanding of authenticity and being-towards-death) then one can begin to make sense of Nietzsche's demand that "only he who constructs the future has a right to judge the past."[52]

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[49] See H. G. Gadamer, Reason in the Age of Science, tr. Federick G.O Lawrence (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press), p. 40.

[50] See H. Dreyfus, "Beyond Hermeneutics: Interpretation in Late Heidegger and Recent Foucault" in Hermeneutics: Questions and Prospects (1984). The process of a hermeneutics of suspicion is articulated by Ricoeur in his book Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation, tr. D. Savage (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977).

[51] See Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1982), p. xxii.

[52] F. Nietzsche, "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life" in Untimely Meditations, tr. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 94.

How to go on, how to practise the good life in the postmodern predicament is thus something that is inextricably linked with a changed relationship to historical existence. That Foucault should be read as stimulating such a changed relationship is the guiding principle of this thesis. Rather than understanding his critical thrust to consist of a radical anti-history with no defined purpose in the sense of a contribution to a goal, end-state, production of action, or process, this presents Foucault in terms of the effect of his work upon the time of action as conceived in the notion of historical inauguration. In Young's characterization of his work as displaying the possibility/impossibility of history and hence the preeminence of the textual dimension of historiography there can also be gleaned another story of the preeminence of the ethical dimension situated in the present and conceived of as the time of initiation and decision. Foucault never imposes an ethically neutral vision of the world but induces a new evaluation of the world and of the reader at the same time. It remains for the reader to respond to this invitation in the world of action.

That this appears as an unashamedly existential reading of historicity understood primarily as the moment of resolve, is a signal for caution. Insofar as in the political and ethical field this is not to be understood as the victory of narrative identity over difference and otherness but the task of preventing these two poles from becoming a schism then I believe Ricoeur begins an answer to Foucault's constant withholding practice towards political formation which is the outgrowth of his sceptical and transgressive drive. That this is itself a specific response both politically and historically already leads to a suspicion about it escaping Ricoeur's polarity. This is not to endorse wholeheartedly Ricoeur's wager for concordance but it is to practice the possibility of

going against the grain which Foucault calls working on limits. The limits of modern Western thought does not consist of a dominant mood of postmodern uncertainty and transgression but rather massive and implacable structures of logocentric, identitarian and Eurocentric thinking which it is necessary to oppose. The dominant understanding of philosophy "at the limit" sees this as only a strategy on the way in which the desire for permanent land is to be left behind but can we not say that the visiting of new shores is a better metaphor for the inevitable and necessary formation of ethical and political identities. Immediately as I write this I become conscious of its colonial imagery. The weighing of anchor in 'foreign parts' is also the process of imperialism. An answer to this can only be the mundane one that philosophy does not require the infinite sailing upon the high seas in order to be strenuous. It is such demands that have structured the search for necessary truths and/or authenticity and a certain transgression of this desire would not seem amiss.

Chapter 2

The Narrativist Position: Historiography as Disclosive Refiguration

In this chapter I want to explore first, the similarities and differences between three major voices in the debate about the potentiality and validity of narrative understanding for historical existence and historiography, namely Hayden White, Paul Ricoeur, and David Carr.[1] Insofar as these thinkers acknowledge the central importance of narrative in understanding the constitution of historiography and historicity they can be said to converge upon a certain rejection of what F. R. Ankersmit has termed "epistemological philosophy of history".[2] However, I will argue that the differences that do emerge between these three thinkers are indicative of a wider problem and perhaps instability in the theorisation of history. This might be termed, in a Nietzschean vein, the question of the purposes of historiography and historical understanding for life. This question was initially raised by the challenges posed to traditional historiographical positions by structuralists and poststructuralists, specifically those of Barthes, Levi-Strauss, Althusser and Foucault, who by vigorously subjecting the claims of narrative historiography to certain standards of scientificity and by practising a demythologizing of its claims to the status of universality and naturalness motivated by a certain anti-humanism, attempted to question the ideological uses that narrative history so often served.[3] This challenge was no doubt itself a continuation in other areas

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[1] See Hayden White, Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1973), The Tropics of Discourse (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1978), The Content of the Form (1987); Paul Ricoeur, Time and Narrative (1984-88), and David Carr, Time, Narrative and History (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).

[2] F. R. Ankersmit, "The Dilemma of Contemporary Anglo-Saxon Philosophy of History" in History and Theory, vol. ? p. 4.

[3] See Roland Barthes, "The Discourse of History" and "The Reality Effect" in The Rustle of Language, tr. Richard Howard (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986) and "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives" in Image, Music, Text, tr. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977). Claude Lévi-Strauss, The Savage Mind (1966). Louis Althusser, For Marx, tr. Ben Brewster (London: Allen Lane, 1969) and with Etienne

of the *Annales* school's own criticism of narrative history as being deeply unscientific and concerned with the "froth" on the surface of real historical circumstances.[4] The structuralist and poststructuralist challenge to traditional history has led in turn to a renewed attempt on the part of thinkers working from a position of sympathy for the historiographical enterprise as an interpretative process, to defend and expand the ethical and political implications of their positions and led to the remergence of an interest and defence of the ineliminable narrative character of historical existence. With Hayden White this has led to the necessity to confront the 'Other' of the historiographical demand for meaning that is to be found in the "sublime" vision of history as a meaningless field.[5] Whilst with Ricoeur this has led to a deeper reflection upon the dialectic of tradition and utopia in social life.[6] The defence of narrative modes of understanding and of the importance of the narrative expansion and dissolution of personal, social, and political identities has thus I argue, taken a more complex and subtle position than earlier accounts. Whether such a move really answers the radical criticisms posed by poststructuralism is something that will be addressed by the confrontation with Foucault's undercutting of the positive identity forming thrust of historiography that will be presented in the next chapter.

Balibar, Reading Capital, tr. Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 1979). Michel Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge, (1972)

[4] See F. Braudel, On History, trans. Sarah Matthews (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980)

[5] See "The Politics of Historical Interpretation: Discipline and De-sublimation" in The Content of the Form, (1987)

[6]. See Paul Ricoeur, Lectures on Ideology and Utopia, ed. by George H. Taylor (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

(i) The Decline of Narrative Historiography

Historiography has been conceived and practised throughout much of its own history as the recounting of the past in the form of narrative. Even the twin masters of nineteenth century philosophical history, Hegel and Marx, both couch their sciences in narrative form. Hegel narrates world history as the journey of Spirit coming to self-realization, and even Marx's aspirations to historical scientificity are enframed in the narrative of the long and inevitable emancipation of mankind. This has been a predominant view of historiography and a largely unchallenged one due to the nature of much of the subject matter of such historiography, even when aspiring to scientific status.[7] So long as the historical past has been taken to be ultimately about human events, human struggles and relationships, then it was fairly easy to conceive of the writing of history of such a past as a narrative, a story of these human events. The background to the debates about the place of narrative in historiography and the status of the discourse of history, is the much more general question of why tell history in the first place? In Nietzsche's cutting question (which we shall see in chapter three, still bears down upon historiographical reflection today) what are its uses and disadvantages? Before questions of epistemology are to be resolved it might be thought that questions of ontology, politics, and ethics should be raised. This has not always been the case, however, especially in discussions of the value of narrative in the service of historical representation. A good deal of the English speaking debate about the role of narrative in historiography had, until the publication

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[7] This aspiration to the position of a science has been an important element of much historiography since the beginnings of its professionalization in the nineteenth century and it is around this desire that Foucault's own doubts about its value in-itself hinge.

of Hayden White's seminal Metahistory in 1973, been predominantly concerned with the criteria for the truth and validity of historical descriptions and explanations. This focused specifically upon the epistemological question as to the conditions under which we are justified in believing the historian's statements about the past. This epistemological bent meant that the relation between historical statements and what they refer took priority over ontological questions about the nature of historiography as a human practice. It is this decision to prioritise epistemology that prevented, and still prevents an understanding of the thrust of recent narrativist themes in the philosophy of history. At the same time it must be recognized that most working historians have generally taken little serious account of the philosophical debates about the status of historical knowledge and regarded them as liable to confuse rather than clarify the essential matter of historical research.[8] This attitude is, however, remarkably consonant with a general positivist understanding of epistemology in which the historian's first and last task is to accumulate factual knowledge about the past in a process that disregards the beliefs, values and social and political situation of the historian.

One way to enter the increasingly mounting literature upon this subject is from the broader perspective of the debate between humanism and anti-humanism.[9] Following Kate Soper, the term humanism is here used to denote a wide set of philosophies inspired principally by an anthropologizing of the work of Hegel, Husserl and Heidegger. This would include the Marxist existentialism of Sartre and the

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8 See G. R. Elton, The Practice of History (London: Fontana, 1969), pp. vii-viii.

9 This is for example, the strategy that Kate Soper uses in Humanism and Anti-Humanism (London: Hutchinson, 1986) in order to delineate in broad terms between two essentially different styles of thought.

phenomenological anthropology of Merleau-Ponty. It is from this perspective in particular, that one can usefully compare the work of Foucault and its implications for the writing of history, especially historiography associated with historical interpretation and philosophical hermeneutics. In relation to the writing of history this specifically concerns the question of who makes history and what constitutes the content of history. The main impetus of such positions is to insist that individuals are to varying degrees able to distanciate themselves both from their historicity and consequently society in the sense that it is their individual meaningful actions which lie at the source of the historical and social. It is human beings who create the historical structures and institutions of society; they who are constitutive of historical and social life; and they who are able, therefore in the last instance, to control and shape the development of the historical societies which they inhabit and reciprocally constitute. The distinctive role of human activity in the creation of historical conditions of existence is irreducible. An important part of this position consists in the claim that in order to understand human historical existence one cannot do away with the meanings, values and intentions that individuals bring to action. Within the tradition of the *Geistwissenschaften* this led to a fundamental separation between the study of human phenomena and the study of physical phenomena; Dilthey being an early proponent of the development of an independent methodology for the human sciences.[10]

History differs from the natural process in its very nature; in having as its subject matter the creations of moral and rational agents. Meaning is

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[10] See Dilthey: Selected Writings, ed., trans. and introduced by H. P. Rickman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976). The dismantling of this distinct separation between the human and physical sciences from both the scientific and hermeneutical points of view is well discussed by Bernstein in his Beyond Objectivism and Relativism (1983)

literally part of the being of history, because history is itself contrived by those who act in the light of reasons, values and beliefs. Moreover to deny significance to history is to adopt a 'neutral', scientific stance, which is not a trans-historical position but rather a particular kind of value position in itself. History thus, derives its particular 'non-natural' status from the fact that it is the product of a form of activity differing substantially from the behaviour of other species. Human events differ from natural events because the identity between the enquirer and history enables a far deeper understanding of the subject matter. In contrast to the tacit consensus around the empiricist values of observational facts, disinterested research, and the unity of science, this position places primacy upon the role of the enquirer in the formulation of historiography and can legitimately be understood as a form of Idealism in many of its incarnations.

The elaborate positivistic understanding of scientific history in terms of general causal laws formalized by Hempel, and subsequently the subject of much philosophical debate, has had little effect upon the practice of historians.[11] It is in this context that the attraction of a more loosely understood 'scientific' model has been of paramount importance in contemporary historiography. This understanding of history as a kind of art which is itself equated with traditional narrative remains very much alive but nevertheless exists under the shadow of the scientific ideal.

For philosophers in the existentialist-phenomenological tradition history has always been less an object of study than a mode of being-in-the-world that makes possible understanding itself.[12] Historical knowledge is

[11] C. G. Hempel, "The Function of General Laws in History" in Theories of History, ed. Gardiner (New York: The Free Press, 1959), pp. 344-6.
[12] See Heidegger, Being and Time, pp. 434-449.

produced on a basis completely different from the physical or structural-functional social sciences. For thinkers such as Gadamer and Ricouer, historiography is less a discovery or decipherment of the past's traces, than an interpretation or translation, a carrying over of meanings from one discursive community to another. It is tradition that unites the interpreter with the *interpretandum*, in an activity that establishes the individuality and communality of both.

The question that most divides anti-humanists from the philosophical anthropology of humanists (and distinguishes them from traditional historians) is 'who makes history?' For those such as Lévi-Strauss, Althusser and Foucault, all humanism is ideological. An anthropology is possible only on the condition that it rejects the concept of the human subject; men do not make history, nor find their truth or purpose in it, for history is a process without a subject. Foucault puts the issue succinctly:

> Continuous history is the indispensable correlative of the founding function of the subject: the guarantee that everything that has eluded him may be restored to him; the certainty that time will disperse nothing without restoring it in a reconstituted unity; the promise that one day the subject - in the form of historical consciousness - will once again be able to appropriate, to bring back under his sway, all those things that are kept at a distance by difference, and find in them what might be called his abode.
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> In various forms, this theme has played a constant role since the nineteenth century: to preserve, against all decentrings, the sovereignty of the subject, and the twin figures of anthropology and humanism. (AK,12)

This sort of position is obviously antithetical to claims that there might be a place for narrative in the practice of history. The very idea of history as a process that is meaningfully constituted by consciousness

as a past developing towards the present is regarded as ethnocentric and profoundly unscientific. Moreover, poststructuralism in its Nietzschean attack upon the value of 'truth', regards any attempt to represent history faithfully as the 'events' themselves happened, as itself profoundly motivated by Western onto-theology, which represses other ways of relating to history and indeed other ways of being altogether.

The value of narrative in the representation of history has been under attack at least since the *Annales* school first sought to undermine the narrative form in historiography. This explicitly objectivistic and scientific attack upon narrative continued with the rise of structuralism and, despite their rejection of such scientific aspirations, poststructuralists have generally been suspicious of the attempt to place the narrative form in the service of historiography. Typically it is seen as an outmoded and ethnocentric form of writing and as bearing the unmistakable imprints of metaphysical humanism. Hayden White, who has characterised poststructuralism as an "absurdist moment"[13] is nevertheless clear on the reasons why narrative is guilty until proven innocent.

For White, the humblest narrative is always more than a chronological series of events and it is the meaning constituted over and above these simple elements that renders narrative a imposition upon 'reality', which, he claims, cannot be said to bear such overall meaning. Narrative synthesis does not bear true witness to historical reality which has no internal coherence in itself. In a similar vein, Barthes argued that:

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13 Hayden White, Tropics of Discourse, (1978).

> For history not to signify, discourse must be limited to a pure unstructured series of notations: these will be chronicles and annals (in the pure sense of the word). In constituted historical discourse, the facts related irresistably function either as indices or as nuclei whose very succession has an indicial value; and even though facts are presented in an anarchic manner, they at least *signify* anarchy and refer to a certain negative idea of human history.[14]

In a discussion of the uses of narrative in historiography, White concludes with these rhetorical questions:

> Does the world really present itself to perception in the form of well-made stories, with central subjects, proper beginnings, middles, and ends, and a coherence that permits us to see 'the end' in every beginning? Or does it present itself more in the forms that the annals and chronicle suggest, either as mere sequence without beginning or end or as sequences of beginnings that only terminate and never conclude.[15]

White has been especially influential in exposing the variety of literary and tropological structures which historians have used as frameworks for their accounts of the past and his contribution to the debate will be discussed later in the chapter.

Recent debates within the historical profession often seem to suggest that what is at issue is the question whether the historian should tell a story that is. narrate his material in a chronological, cause-effect way or not. The alternatives to this practice are usually held to be the more 'modern' methods which following the social and economic sciences present synchronic and if possible quantitative, models of past affairs.[16]

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14 R Barthes, "The Discourse of History", p. 137.
15 White, The Content of the Form, p. 122.
16 See the essays in Constructing the Past: Essays in Historical Methodology, ed. by Jacques Le Goff and Pierre Nora (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985)

It was the development of new historical methods and documentation dealing with the general and the mass rather than the particular and the individual and lacking in 'events', that first established a serious basis for non-narrative history and challenged the traditional core of historical knowledge. The *Annales* group were the first prominent body of professional historians to be critical of narrative history (although Marxism in the primacy given to the dialectic of the forces and relations of production and its emphasis upon the class struggle as the motor of history, is arguably the first and greatest attempt at a scientific and total history.) For the *Annalists*, narrative history was simply the history of past politics and moreover, political history was conceived as short-term, dramatic conflicts and crisis lending themselves to novelistic representations, of a more literary than scientific kind. Narrative history consists of an interpretation of history dominated by dramatic happenings in the lives of men. In contrast they promoted a historiography devoted to the analysis of 'long-term' trends in demography, economics, and ethnology, that is, to much more impersonal processes. Such approaches really blossomed with the advent of the computer as a tool for processing large and complex data and of course take on an aura of authority simply through issuing in seemingly incontrovertible statistical declarations. Aside from doubts about enthusiastic claims for the inherent objectivity of quantative methodologies, it is important not to lose sight of the academic aspirations of the 'New histories' that have flourished since the war. The simple desire to evacuate the clearly non-scientific narrative form from historiography in order to approach scientificity proceeds with as much the same motives as earlier nineteenth century attempts to represent the past as it was. That is, with the aim of achieving respectability and

power within the academy by imitating the aims and methods of the physical sciences.

Nevertheless, although the debate about the scientific aspirations of history are important (particularly for Foucault) it is with another issue that I am concerned here. The rejection of narrative history was as much a result of a distaste for its conventional subject matter and past politics than a belief that its form was novelistic rather than scientific. This distaste for the dramatizing effect of narrative form can be construed as a decision to put impersonal processes and structures at the centre of history rather than human agents who have significant control over their own destinies. Thus, the debate over whether historiography should utilise narrative forms or look to more statistical techniques in order to represent the past is not as crucial a issue as that of whether history itself is a discipline implicated in humanist assumptions. While historians might attempt to process more and more data and seek the elusive goal of 'total history', they are nonetheless working within the framework of meaning production that is itself a deeply problematic assumption.

The countermovement against history as a discipline questions the strategies and conditions which allow the possibility of secure meaning in the very writing of history. History here, is an especial field of contention because of its ultimate dependence upon and buttressing of humanism understood as the ideological site of the sovereign subject. So although histories that proceeded with models taken from the economic and social sciences seemed to hint at a decentring of man, they merely renewed the notions of continuous and total history in their scientific totalizations. It was the very possibility of constructing a total history

that in turn became a natural common-sensical perspective that was peculiarly ripe for ideological critique. The fact that historical analysis itself revealed seemingly inevitable components of human life to be constituted did not mean that the historical perspective could itself be immune to such deconstruction.

As we have seen above, from the structural-anthropological perspective as represented by Lévi-Strauss it was not narrative so much as history that was the problem. In his famous polemic against Sartre, he denied the validity of the distinction between historical or civilised and pre-historical or primitive societies and the notion of a specific method of study and mode of representing the structures and processes of the former.[17] Historical knowledge was in this sense hardly distinguishable from the myths of 'savage' communities. Historiography is here charged with being merely the myth of modern Western societies. Its diachronic method which represents events in chronological order is for Levi-Strauss a poor scientific model compared to the analytical techniques that enable the identification of the common properties of events as elements of a structure.

The chronological ordering of events is thus regarded as culture specific in that the representation of time can take many cultural forms. Narrative chronologies can claim no especial privilege in this plurality and it was the fact that Western history does claim such a privileged status amongst others that enabled Levi-Strauss to pronounce it to be a deceptive and ethnocentric method of analysis. This ethnocentric blindness was compounded by the fact that the practice of narrative historiography meshed extraordinarily well with other societal practices

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17 Levi-Strauss, The Savage Mind, p. 263.

to constitute a human subject conforming to the requirements and conditions of the modern Western states.

This notion of the reproduction of the subject is something Barthes linked to Nietzsche's depiction of humanity's ability to make promises. The possibility of the subject becoming a unitary and identical individual is facilitated by the acquirement of the capability to understand and tell narratives and thus the ability to place oneself in a coherent network of intelligibility. We shall see later that Ricoeur makes this ability a crucial component of our ethical responsibility but without wishing to imply the closure of the unitary subject. The coherence that the narrative capacity enables here does not signify the centred consciousness that masters its world but the imperfect network of life-stories that are more the entanglements than the orderings of a closed subject.

According to Barthes the development of realism in the nineteenth century novel and objectivity in historiography were inextricably intertwined. The crux of their mutuality lay in the narrative mode. Barthes argued that: "'What takes place' in a narrative is from the referential (reality) point of view literally *nothing*; 'what happens' is language alone, the adventure of language, the unceasing celebration of its coming."[18] In 'The Discourse of History', he extended this arguing that:

> in "objective" history, the "real" is never anything but an unformulated signified, sheltered behind the apparent omnipotence of the referent. This situation defines what we might call the *reality effect*... historical discourse does not follow the real, it merely signifies it, constantly repeating

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18 R. Barthes, "The Structural Analysis of Narratives", in Image Music Text, tr. S. Heath (London: Fontana, 1977), p. 124.

> *this happened*, without this assertion ever being anything but the signified *wrong side* of all historical narration.[19]

According to Barthes "Our entire civilization has a taste for the reality effect" to be found in as diverse mediums as the realistic novel, the private diary, documentary literature, the news item, the historical museum, etc. The disappearance of narration in contemporary historical science was for him a "veritable ideological transformation" indicating that the "sign of History is henceforth not so much *the real as the intelligible.*"[20] However, this does not mean that somehow modern historical methods such as those used by the *Annales* group are more 'realistic' simply by being less narrativistic. Barthes is clearly in favour of Nietzsche's dictum that "facts is precisely what there is not, only interpretations"[21] It is because historical discourse promotes the model of "linguistic existence" as a pure and simple "copy" of another existence, situated in an extra-structural field, the 'real', that it is so fit for in Barthes' terms demythologization.

The critical rigour of historiography is thus to be achieved through a rupture with the natural life-world of narrative human consciousness. We shall see in the next section that it is precisely this intrinsicality which is appealed to as justification for the whole-hearted acceptance of narrative in the writing of historiography. The fact that narrative form has been widely regarded within the historical discipline as neither a product of a theory nor the basis for a method, but rather as a form of discourse that may or may not be used for the representation of

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19 R. Barthes, "The Discourse of History", in The Rustle of Language, tr. R. Howard (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 139.
20 Ibid. p. 140.
21 Ibid. p. 138. See F. Nietzsche, The Will to Power, tr. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, ed. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), p. 481.

historical events, at once leads one to suspect the hidden implications of its use. Usually it has been seen as merely a means to an end, that is, to facilitate the communication of historical research and not an end in itself. As White points out, the question whether narrative represents historical events accurately thus centres upon the possibility of the distinction between form and content. This distinction in turn enables the separation of the fields of history and fiction. Of course a driving assumption amongst historians is that their stories refer to real events whereas fiction involves a suspension of belief in such a referring relation on the part of its audience. This in turn implies that history is in some way discovered rather than, like fiction, constructed. It is this assumption that Barthes questioned and which White in particular has sought to undermine via a concentration upon the textual production that is historiography.

Traditionally the narrative historian has seen herself as revealing the truth about the past from the documents and artefacts of the past in order to tell the most plausible narrative about this past. The form of historical discourse is seen to add nothing to the content in this respect; rather it is ideally a reproduction of the structure and processes of real events that are seen as essentially elements of a true narrative. As long as the representation resembles the events that it represents, it can be taken as a true account. Thus, the narrative form does not contribute anything new to the historical past. The tendency amongst those who defend the legitimacy of the narrative mode for historical representation is to stress its communicative function. For them, history's content is both information and an explanation. The statements of a chronicle correspond to actual events and the narrative configuration is thus conceived to correspond to the actual structure of

the events in time. The form of this narrative is thus considered to be merely a structure which conveys the truth of its content without affecting the status of this inner core of truth content.

White argues that this notion of narrative fails to take into account the various kinds of narratives that every culture arrays for those of its members who might wish to draw upon them for the encoding and transmission of messages, and also the enormous variety of codes which authors interweave for the production of infinitely rich stories. Discourse is not just a vehicle but consists in as much of its form as it does of whatever information it might provide. To change the form of discourse would change its meaning too. A set of events written in chronological order is not devoid of meaning but rather its meaning is precisely the kind that any list is capable of producing. Narrative uses other codes than just the chronicle but it is not that narrative explains more than the chronicle, rather it produces a meaning different from chronicalization.

White argues that in historical discourse, the narrative serves to transform into a story a list of historical events that would otherwise be only a chronicle. In order to effect this transformation, the events, agents, and agencies represented in the chronicle must be encoded as kinds of elements that can be apprehended as story elements. This inevitably directs the reader's attention to a secondary referent, different from the events that make up the primary referent, namely the plot structures of the various story types cultivated in a given culture. The comprehension of these story types is at the same time the comprehending of the meaning of the discourse.

In Metahistory White elaborates a theory of tropes in the analysis of historical discourse. Language is considered to be crucial in this process, in that rhetoric and theoretical self-reflection are essential to the writing of history and it is the writing of history that is constitutive of historical understanding. Historical narratives are:

> verbal fictions the contents of which are as much *invented as found and the forms of which have more in common with their counterparts in literature than they have with those in the sciences.*[22]

White's overall aim is to question the distinction between those who write history and those who write about writing history. For White it is more the "master historians" of the nineteenth century rather than the rigourous under-labourers of factual accumulation that provide an insight into the essence of historiography. This parallels the argument that since the middle of the nineteenth century most professional historians have self-consciously adopted a theoretical and methodological simplicity.

White criticizes positivism and the simple use of traditional narrative in the writing of history. Both approaches share a conception of the 'facts' as the indubitable givens of history, and marginalise the interpretative nature of historiography by regarding it as a more or less plausible way of imaginatively completing the spaces in the historical record. Finally, both have an equal distrust of the kind of speculative history produced by White's visionaries such as Michelet, Ranke, Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche and Croce.

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22 H. White, "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact" in Tropics of Discourse (1978), p. 82.

White sees narrative as a potentially repressive force, especially after rhetoric and the possible visions of history it engendered were rejected when history sought to become a scientific discipline in the early nineteenth century. In seeking the status of scientificity, historiography necessarily represses its interpretative nature and consequent insertion in the political field. One of the most important implications of this scientisation is the division between philosophy of history which aims at analysing the claims of history and history as simply practised without conscious awareness of the need for philosophical justification about the implicit choices in its actual constitution.

White asks: "What is ruled out by conceiving the historical object in such a way that not to conceive it in that way would constitute *prima facie* evidence of want of 'discipline'?"[23] His answer is rhetoric, which he describes following Kant, as the awareness of a variety of ways of configuring a past which in itself exists only as a chaos of forms. By de-rhetoricizing history, in the drive to create a discipline, historical studies in fact chose a certain mode which excludes from its scope the possibility of expressing or imagining all that does not pass for the common sense of socially 'responsible' individuals at a given moment.

In propounding a certain mode of rhetoric which found its natural expression in the realistic narrative forms of nineteenth century prose fictions, history became a 'discipline' by associating itself with ways of thinking and writing that were already established in existing practises and structures of power and discourse and which could therefore claim to be natural modes of thinking.

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23 The Content of the Form, p. 126.

White focuses on the historiographic genealogy: annal, chronicle, history. His suggestion is that in this apparent progression in human consciousness of the past we see a growth of narrativity, which can only exist in a social world which recognizes some corporate entity which might serve as the organizing principle for a narrative selection of facts. The annal with its discontinuous gaps between years, its lack of any theme or subject that can be followed, and its variety of annalists can be seen at best as a record of time which might be meaningful only to God. Narrative appears with a social consciousness, and carries with it the burden of representing that consciousness to its members, with all the political and ideological consequences that the construction of social consciousness entails.

What White calls into question, like Barthes, is the unfailing ability of narrative to make sense out of things, and to present them in a form that seems natural. As Barthes argues:

> In the historical discourse of our civilization, the process of signification always aims at "filling" the meaning of History: the historian is the one who collects not so much facts as signifiers and relates them, ie. organizes them in order to establish a positive meaning and to fill the void of pure series.[24]

This is narrative's mythic aspect, both in the Aristotelian sense that narrative always gives things a plot of some sort, but also in Barthes' sense that narrative turns the chaos of history into an illusion of the immediacy and order of nature. Narrativity is virtually inescapable but it is for all that, not natural. One of the possibilities that is ruled out by the study of history is the possibility that history is meaningless in itself and White argues this should never be ruled out of any discipline.

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[24] Barthes, "The Discourse of History", pp. 137-8.

White's theory is clearly constructivist in its emphasis upon the productive function of consciousness in contrast to the representative function stressed by the mimetic epistemology of traditional positivist and narrativist historiography. Tropes have a prefigurative and projective function in constituting a field of discourse, and the emphasis is upon making explicit the interpretative and explanatory strategies implicit in historiography. The attempt to reduce this interpretative process by the flight into a natural positivism is always illusory and yet White's argument tends to issue in the argument that 'reality' is not so much nonexistent as present as a kind of chaotic Kantian noumenal world behind the discourse of history. This is despite his intention that we should enquire into the nature of interpretation and its implications and positive possibilities in the reconstruction of the past.

White has argued that there is an absurdist moment in contemporary literary theory in which he includes figures such as Barthes, Foucault and Derrida.[25] Their responses to the problem of writing are considered to be indicative of the lack of conviction in Western culture and the culmination of the fate of modernity as a flawed project.

However, I wish to argue that White's placing of historical discourse up against the limit of meaninglessness, which it cannot incorporate without the production of meaning, whilst an essential step in understanding historiographical writing as the production of sense from non-sense, is only a element in grasping why narrative, in its broadest sense of historical interpretation, is so important and maybe indispensable to the writing of history. The possibility that the study of history be in some way meaningless is difficult to comprehend unless it is meant to imply

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[25] See Tropics of Discourse, chap. 11.

the possibility of a world where there could be no possibility of the study of history. By this I do not mean to say that the study or process of history is in some way inherently meaningful; that it carries with it an implicit *telos* of rationality and meaning. Nor do I imply that because history is a human production it is by definition meaningful because human being is intrinsically meaningful. Rather I wish to challenge the meaningfulness of White's charge that history could possibly be meaningless *in itself*. This possibility arises only from White's characterization of narrativity or history as non-natural because of its constructed nature. This is to assume that one could postulate over against the human constructs of historiography an in-itself of a chaotic realm of pure process that would in some way be the 'natural' beneath our interpretations. The strong constructivist tendencies inherent in White's theory, lead him at times to lend credence to the idea of an unprocessed historical record. This record is supposedly offered as a dormant object waiting to be animated by the productive work of the historian. Such a definite distinction between the natural and the non-natural is precisely the kind of distinction that White's theory of the linguistic figuration of historiography is designed to point up as a production itself.

The recognition that the historical record is itself a text that is always already processed, implies that the historian always begins as situated in the context of traditions of discourse and weakens White's argument that history as a meaningless in-itself is ruled out as a positive possibility of history. The notion of an unprocessed historical record can be seen as a critical fiction, a kind of sublime intimation of the chaos of history. The absolute negativity of this possibility, however, means that it is not something that can be regarded as a pure, primary 'given' to

be derived through a process of distillation of the 'facts' from their implication in story, plot, and myth.

In this sense, White's argument that narrative is a "cultural universal because language is a human universal" has to be seen not as an argument for its arbitrary nature but as an indication of its intimate connections with the universal existentials of understanding and discourse as distinguished by Heidegger (BT,203) From the perspective that historical discourse is necessarily interpretation which takes the form of narrative in order to be distinctively historical, the question of the function of narrativity in the production of the historical text indeed becomes paramount. White's emphasis upon the linguistic figuration of the historical text as "first and foremost a verbal artefact, a product of a special kind of language-use"[26] can thus be seen as an endorsement of the Barthesian suspicion of history as a kind of writing that cannot escape the 'reality effect' if it is to differentiate itself from fiction. In this sense what is required is not new histories that somehow efface this desire for fidelity to the past as a extra-discursive referent, but a changed relationship to the historicity of human existence altogether. To the extent that this relationship will always be linguistically constituted White can justify the primacy of the analysis of language for the philosophy of history:

> In short, historical discourse should not be considered primarily as a special case of the "workings of our minds" in its efforts to know reality or to describe it, but rather as a special kind of language use which, like metaphoric speech, symbolic language, and allegorical representation, always means more than it literally says, says something other than what it seems to mean and reveals something

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[26] H. White, "Figuring the Nature of Times Deceased: Literary Theory and Historical Writing" in The Future of Literary Theory, ed. Ralph Cohen (New York: Routledge, 1989) p. 22.

> about the world only at the cost of concealing something else.[27]

White's emphasis upon irony for critical self-consciousness as both a dissolving and debunking attitude is counter-balanced by his appreciation of the master historians of the nineteenth century and their genius for providing renewed contact with history and historical existence. In particular Nietzsche is considered to be a prime example of someone who strove to keep alive a metaphoric relationship with the world without simply resorting to a naive mythologizing.[28]

The question at the heart of White's reflections is precisely the irredeemably textual nature of historiography:

> The peculiar dialectic of historical discourse - and of other forms of discursive prose as well, perhaps even the novel - comes from the effort of the author to mediate between alternative modes of emplotment and explanation, which means, finally, mediating between alternative modes of language use or tropological strategies for originally describing a given field of phenomena and constituting it as a possible object of representation.... This aim of mediation, in turn, drives him toward the ironic recognition that any given linguistic protocol will obscure as much as it reveals about the reality it seeks to capture in an order of words. This aporia or sense of contradiction residing at the heart of language itself is present in all of the classic historians. It is this linguistic self- consciousness which distinguishes them from their mundane counterparts and followers, who think that language can serve as a perfectly transparent medium of representation.[29]

It is with a more affirmative and contestatory understanding of narrative which is related to the multiplicity of interpretations that one might be able to refuse the tendency in White's work towards relegating

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[27] Ibid. p. 25.
[28] For a discussion of this aspect of Nietzsche's philosophy see Eric Blondel, "Nietzsche: Life as Metaphor, in The New Nietzsche, tr. Mairi Macrae, ed. D. B. Allison (New York: Dell, 1977).
[29] Tropics of Discourse, p. 130.

the structuring of language upon the world to a practise of fictive consolation. From this perspective, White's own work draws its strength precisely from promoting contestation and controversy.

History is from White's perspective primarily interpretation because of its linguisticality and not because of the finitude of historical existence. This is why he makes the impossibility of clearly distinguishing between the discursive form and interpretative content of historical writing the central tenet of his position. From a philosophical hermeneutic standpoint the ontological primacy of historicity and hence of interpretative understanding emerges equiprimordially with linguisticality (*Sprachlichkeit*). The possibility of history appearing as meaningless is ruled out because following Heidegger's analysis of *Dasein* as being-in-the-world, existence is always already "submitted to a 'world', and exists factically with Others." (BT,435)[30] The facticity of existence, the belonging to history before it belongs to us means that the possibility of treating it as meaningless in itself can only arise after the event. It is thus far from being a chaotic realm which a linguistic figuration forms into the "formal coherency of the kind of plot structures met with in narrative fiction".[31] Rather, White's argument that emplotment works upon a kind of pure chronologically ordered series of events fails to bring out the fact that such a series is itself more the product of abstraction than narrative emplotment. Following Heidegger's discussion of the "as" structure of understanding and interpretation we might say that freeing history from the structure of "something as something" requires a "certain readjustment" and, far from being primordial, is derived from "the kind of seeing in which one *merely* understands."

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30 See also p. 174.
31 White, "Literary Theory and Historical Writing", p. 26.

(BT,190) This is bound up with the rejection of interpretation as a kind of throwing of "'signification' over some naked thing which is present-at-hand", (BT,190) but a structure grounded in the essential fore-having, fore-sight and fore-conception of understanding. This thrownness, in turn, leads to the concern with what it means to belong to a tradition and to the possible distantiation from that tradition that becomes the basis for philosophical hermeneutics.

White's position stems from a belief that "stories are not lived" and that "there is no such thing as a 'real' story."[32] Hence, because he sees history as the transformation of a chronicle into a story guided by the plot structures of arbitrary cultural traditions, he is unable to countenance the possibility of the kind of hermeneutical event of truth of the tradition that Gadamer wishes to argue for. In contrast to White's convictions that life is not a story and that experience is not structured narratively, Paul Ricoeur and David Carr have argued for quite the opposite in order to shore up the philosophical importance of narrative for historical existence. It is to these two positions that I now turn.

(ii) The Universality of Narrative for Life: The Roots of History

David Carr argues that historical narrative is rooted in an everyday, pre-thematic historical experience, and that this ordinary temporal experience has a narrative structure.[33] The historian's narratives are in this way extensions of pre-scientific, historical experience. Their content is fed by this common pre-thematic grasp of the historical past and their form is supplied by our lived experience of time. History is thus a

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[32] Ibid. p. 27.
[33] David Carr, Time, Narrative, History (Bloomington, Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1986)

secondary reconfiguration but nevertheless bears and imitates similar structures to lived experience. In this respect there are strong similarities between Carr and Ricoeur's evaluation of the place of narrative in existence. Carr, however, has been concerned to distance himself from a complete identification of their respective theories[34] The major difference as he sees it is in the connection and importance of this connection, between lived experience and historical narratives. Carr is concerned to emphasize the rootedness of the form of historiographical narrative in ordinary life and he believes that Ricoeur wrongly emphasizes the disjunction between the two to the detriment of his own reflections upon the value of narrative. However, one should keep in mind that the two authors are working within a tradition (the phenomenological-hermeneutical one) which divides them from positivistically minded scientific historiography as well as structuralist and poststructuralist perspectives that reject or problematize the constitutive role of human subjects far more than any differences might divide their own positions.

For Carr the intimate connection between time and history arises from the mediations between the two in the form of narrative. Carr argues that our temporal experience is always already organized and that this organization can be said to take the narrative form. Here narrative is not just a literary form secondary to life-experience and distortive of it by an imposition of coherence upon formlessness. Rather narrative is the primary way our experiences are organized throughout the "connectedness of life". Even though historical narratives do go beyond these initial narrative structures of experience and acquire a kind of

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34 See Carr's contribution to the discussion in On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation, ed. David Wood (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 160-174.

unity that is forever deferred in ordinary experience, they are nevertheless of the same basic form. Life may not be a coherent story but the attempt to recount it is not overly distortive of its actual lived structures.

In order to demonstrate the narrative structure of our temporal experience Carr uses Husserl's analyses of internal time consciousness. Carr believes that Husserl principally shows that our consciousness of time has a horizonal structure which enables a transcendence of the point-like "now" of measured time and the comprehending of both the immediate past and future through retention and protention. Husserl's great phenomenological discovery is to show that our temporal experience is not a simple series of unconnected instants which is then artificially structured by consciousness, but always already structured into temporary temporal wholes. It is in this first basic experiential structure that Carr believes can be found the basis for one of the most simple narrative structures, that of closure, of beginning, middle and end.

Carr believes that other typical features of narrative can be found in our lived experience and action (suspension-resolution, departure-arrival, means-end). Moreover, not only does life display such basic narrative features it also bears an equivalence to the narration of a story. For Carr the narrator of fiction, although she may have a knowledge of the whole story thanks to the privileged standpoint of authorial mastery, has a similar structural counterpart in life. The horizons of temporal experience may be inescapably open to new experience but this at the same time allows for one to occupy a multiplicity of perspectives on ones life, including those of the past and

the future. The privileged position of the narrator therefore bears similarities to the possibility of transcending the horizon of the present and viewing it both from the point of the past and the future in order to tell the story of one's life from a variety of interconnected perspectives.

Carr argues that our capacity for attention and for working through complex projects manifests our ability to select certain strands of our experience and bracket our others. Thus, the argument that life is full of "static" and arbitrary meaningless actions and events with fictional narrative precisely does without is a misplaced one. In life there is a constant hierarcization of projects and this inevitably implies a marginalization and rejections of certain possibilities and happenings in order for one to concentrate on the foreground of one's cares and projects. The absence of an authorative narrative voice does not mean that there is not a comparable functional process in life. Furthermore the poststructuralist challenge to authorial mastery strengthens rather than weakens the parallels between narrative text and experience. We are not the authors of our own lives in the strong sense but the extent to which we do bear responsibility for the projects we take up is also inextricably entwined with the stories we tell in the process of living. The "connectedness of life" is a natural relation and not an imposition upon a neutral series of experiences and moreover this is a thesis that bears strong moral implications. Instead of saying that stories are not lived but told, Carr would like to say that they are lived in the telling and told as they are lived.[35]

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35. Time, Narrative, History, p. 61.

A full understanding of history, Carr ultimately argues, has to include the social dimension of narrative. This is why he attempts to demonstrate that narrative structure exists at the social level. In Hegel's analysis of the independence and dependence of self-consciousness, Carr argues one can see the origin of a community that transcends the solitary I and provides a basis for a socially constituted narrative that transcends the multiplicity of private narratives. Although narrative structure can be found on the higher level of social existence Carr does not think that this justifies one in claiming it to be a universal trans-cultural phenomena. Rather he sees it as culturally bound and 'our' Western way of structuring temporal experience. At the same time this does not mean that narrative is artificial in the sense of a fictive production because it is an important structure of Western human being in and dealing with time.[36]

As we have already intimated, Carr criticizes Ricoeur for holding that narrative structure primarily a literary device and thus ultimately tragically applied to the temporal dispersion of life.[37] The whole impetus of Carr's thesis is thus to imply that without a connection between these two spheres there will always be a need for the imposition of narrative structure from the outside in order to prevent the discordance of time.[38]

Carr himself, underplays Ricoeur's own emphasis upon the universality of narrative, however. Ricoeur hardly wishes to imply that narrative is alien to life, an artificial web thrown over its dispersive tendencies.

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[36] Ibid. p. 183.
[37] It is of course, ironic that such a position is attributed to Ricoeur in the context of this thesis which sees his work as motivated by the equal claim for comprehension in the human existence.
[38] Ibid. pp. 14-15. See also n. 2 above.

Instead, Ricoeur argues that experience has an inchoate narrativity that constitutes a genuine demand for narrative. (TN,1,75) For Ricoeur, the belief that the concordance of life is a fable, a projection from the literary domain is itself a result of the modern anti-novel. The discordance of our temporal experience is itself a literary form and one no less violent an imposition upon lived experience. (TN,1,72-3) Carr's insistence upon the narrative structure of experience is it seems merely a difference in emphasis about the actual legitimacy of narrative for existence. Whereas for Ricoeur, narrative brings something more to lived experience and it is this secondary reconfiguration that is of interest, for Carr, the importance of narrative springs precisely from its rootedness in our always already narratively structured experience. Ironically, Carr thinks that Ricoeur's statement that "time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode" is evidence of ethnocentricity. This "transcultural necessity" is something that Carr would dispute as unhistorical and yet it is he who wishes to emphasize the claims of narrative for the service of historiography via is isomorphic connections with lived experience.

Carr's claims for the value of narrativity in historiography are in some sense undermined by the denial that time (which for Ricoeur always bears an important otherness preventing its transparent articulation) is human time when articulated through narrative. Although he wishes to claim a strong connection between the narrative form and historical existence he does not wish to claim a necessary connection. To this extent he believes that narrative may be the only way of confronting time and its dissolutory threat by creatively producing form in historical existence rather than escaping into timelessness.

More importantly, Carr privileges self-narration far too much in the formation of self-identity. We shall see in the next chapter that for Foucault, it is precisely this emphasis upon continuity (and in Carr this exists both on the level of personal identity and on the level of the relation of language to the world) that has to be ceaselessly subjected to dispersion in order to obtain critical distanciation. It is the desire to see life as if it were narrative that is to be questioned. Ultimately I do not think that Foucault's own attempt at a systematics of dispersion can escape the orbit of narrative but this is much more complex than the mere argument that life is narrative through and through. This is why Ricoeur's own meditation upon time and narrative can articulate the dangers involved in Foucault's tendency towards the extreme of anti-narrativism.

(iii) The Articulation of Time Through Narrative

> In truth the historian can never get away from the question of time in history: time sticks to his thinking like soil to a gardener's spade.[39]

In Time and Narrative, Ricoeur has explored the nature and role of narrative in its relation to temporality and language in the context of its two major modes of fiction and historiography and produced profound reflections upon each. In the case of the writing of history it might be said to constitute a defence of the use of narrative forms, except the complexity and subtlety of Ricoeur's theory make it a far cry from those

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39 F. Braudel "Towards a Historical Economics" in On History, p. 77.

who would simply write historical narrative in the belief either that it adds nothing more to the supposedly atomistic events of the historical record or that narrativity is the correct representation of such events as they actually occurred. The notion that there is an epistemological break distancing historiography as critical inquiry from simple narrative understanding is something that Ricoeur insists upon. (TN,1,175-88) Nevertheless, he finds much to commend in the arguments of theorists such as Louis O Mink and Arthur Danto, who view narrative as providing a kind of explanation different from, though not antithetical to nomological-deductive explanations.[40] He holds that narrativity in historiography is more attuned to the attainment of an understanding of the events of which it speaks than to an explanation of them along the lines found in the physical and social sciences. This is obviously a position firmly embedded within the tradition of hermeneutics as developed by such thinkers as Dilthey and Heidegger. For Ricoeur, unlike analytical philosophers, understanding is not opposed to explanation, rather these two modes of cognition are related dialectically especially in the case of knowledge that deals with human actions rather than natural events and "to explain more is to understand better."[41]

In this respect action is read in the same way as one reads texts and to understand its meaning one has to apply similar hermeneutic principles which ultimately derive from one's own participation in shared contexts of meaning. Thus, the study of the past, for Ricoeur, has the ultimate aim of the understanding of human actions. (TN,1,56) The many types

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40 A. Danto, Analytical Philosopy of History (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1965), Louis O Mink, "The Autonomy of Historical Understanding" History and Theory 5, (1965).

41 TN,1,x. This echoes Paul Veyne's statement that "to explain more is to narrate better" cf. TN,1,171. See also Ricoeur's essays "What is a Text? Explanation and Understanding" and "The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered as a Text" in HHS.

and models of explanation that might be utilised in this process, including those of the various social sciences, are ultimately means to the understanding of meaning. Historiography seeks to portray human events in a way that discloses their always already potential for becoming meaningful and history always obliquely intends the "field of human action and its basic temporality." (TN,1,92)

This grasping of the meaning of human events does not simply involve explanation of their causal sequence. Explanation is, however, an important strand in the effort to understand the meaning of human action which always possesses a surfeit of meaning over its initial meaning, whether this be the actors own intention or the initial reading of the action by an audience at the time. Action produces unforeseen and unintended consequences and becomes reciprocally embodied in social convention, institutions and formations which are then open to an understanding that goes beyond the primary subjective meanings. Understanding historical action means precisely going beyond this surface meaning production to grasp the complex interplay and consequences of action conceived of as extending both spatially and temporally in social and cultural contexts.

Ricoeur argues that historiography especially reveals this process of reading meaningful action because of the configuration of it by narrative. Narrative is not just a feature of fiction but also an important element in the representation of action as historical. In this narrative representation the aporias of time and historical existence are poetically responded to because it:

> combines in variable proportions two temporal dimensions, one chronological and the other not. The former constitutes

> the episodic dimension of narrative. It characterizes the story insofar as it is made up of events. The second is the configurational dimension properly speaking, thanks to which the plot transforms the events into a story. (TN,1,66)

The narrative is not an imposition on the pristine events. Rather it constitutes the historicality of human action in which temporality and narrativity come together. Events become historical because they are more than just unique happenings and it is narrative which produces this historical intelligibility: "the events themselves receive an intelligibility derived from their contribution to the development of the plot." (TN,1,207) Narrative is a response to the paradoxes of time to be found both in lived experience and philosophical analysis, and historiography because of its essential narrativity, is an important field where this response can occur and develop. This is especially the case because its referent is the real events and processes of history rather than the imaginary of fictive narrative. Ricoeur is situating historiography firmly within the question of its role as one particular response to the human experience of time.

As with Carr's analysis of historiography, the narrative function, for Ricoeur, enables one to pass from the simple representation of time as that in which events take place (within-timeness) to historicality where emphasis is upon events as elements of wholes functioning as inaugurations, transformations, endings etc. to meaningful action or processes. This possibility is facilitated by the narrative nature of temporality as articulated through language. Within-timeness is the mode of representation which is articulated by the chronicle as we have seen above in White's analysis of narrative form. Narrative goes beyond this in its depiction of events as elements of complex continuities which does not necessarily imply the smooth ordered continuity of traditional

teleological narratives. For Ricoeur, a narrative is an operation of configuration in which the world is redescribed and at the same time integrated back into the world from which it arises in order to produce the meaning peculiar to the human experience of historicality. It is because of the temporality of human being stretched ecstatically between birth and death that narrative is also a legitimate symbolisation of history. Symbolisation is not alien to historiography because historical events are ultimately symbolic themselves. This is why explanation in terms of structures and causality is never enough in the articulation of time or history because such processes always bear a meaning over and above this explanation. This does not, as remarked above, mean that narrative does not also explain (TN,1,178) but in historicality understood as repetition we are able to grasp the possibility of the retrieval of our most basic potentialities inherited from the past and this presents our historical existence from ever becoming mere causal sequence.[42]

For Ricoeur, the value of narrative for historiography lies in the fact that ultimately the referent of history is historicality and that this can only be represented faithfully through the narrative articulation which brings time to a human dimension. Ricoeur locates narrativity in the human soul as its fundamental way of comprehending the fact of death. In this way questions about the purpose of historical study are placed firmly at the forefront. Ricoeur asserts that narrative remains the essence of history even when history ceases to be about events as in the work of the *Annales* school.

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[42] This recovery of suppressed potentialities I shall argue, is a fundamental structure of Foucault's genealogical history despite the appearance of being driven by the will to dispersion.

What frames this thesis is Augustine's meditation upon time that creates enigmas and aporias even as it seeks the answer to the intractable question: 'What is human time?' and Aristotle's theory of emplotment that, without resolving these aporias theoretically, provides a poetic response to them. It is Augustine's reflections upon the nature of time as a ceaseless "slippage" in the distention of the human soul that enables Ricoeur to postulate narrative as a poetic response to the ultimately discordant experience of time present in human existence. (TN,1,21-2) The neatness of Augustine's threefold present dissolves with the endless and unavoidable "slippage" of the present of the future into the present of the present and of the past. (TN,1,11)

Augustine's meditation on time, Aristotle's theories, or for that matter any philosophical reflection upon time and human time, all struggle with aporias that ultimately cannot be resolved either on the philosophical or lived plane. All such attempts at articulating time cosmologically or phenomenologically are for Ricoeur, struggles against time's ultimate mystery and implacability. At the same time they can be said to increase our understanding of time and our ability to creatively live and deal with the aporias of existence in that they are themselves also poetic responses which reach their limit in the concept of eternity or timelessness and which nevertheless deepen our experience of time in relation to this limit concept. This notion is also, for Ricoeur, the key to understanding the attempts of historiography and literature to 'de-chronologize narrative'. According to him, far from being the denial of temporality, this de-chronologization deepens it. This notion of deepening our understanding of time and history is one that I will argue is the unavoidable framework for understanding the work of Foucault.

Ricoeur thinks that the attempt to de-chronologize narrative and replace the event by, for instance, the long-time span fails to recognize that such replacements are themselves implicitly articulations of human time. Just as the philosophical grapplings with the elusiveness of time are further extensions of our understanding (and this preeminently includes Ricoeur's own reflections) so too are the historiographical attempts at putting time and history on a sure footing. Any attempt to evacuate time from their models is also an implicit call to different forms of experience that can always be recuperated back within human temporality. The blindness to this is for Ricoeur a moral one:

> For the discovery of the long time-span may simply express the fact that human time, which always requires the reference point of a present, is itself *forgotten*. If the brief event can act as a screen hiding our consciousness of the time that is not our making, the long time-span can likewise, act as a screen hiding the time that we see. This disastrous consequence can be avoided only if an analogy can be preserved between the time of individuals and the time of civilizations: the analogy of growth and decline, of creation and death, the analogy of fate. (TN,1,224)

Ricoeur is well aware of the challenge to narrative by both the French historians who have opposed event-oriented history and analytical philosophers who seek to dissolve history's claim to distinction in the general project of the unity of science. This is why he proposes an understanding of the event which is produced by the concept of narrative, rather than the other way round. Events are not the brief and nervous motions described by Braudel, but variables of the plot, which literally comprehends, "grasps together" as an "intelligible whole, circumstances, goals, interactions, and unintended results." It is the extension of human temporal understanding in the form of what Ricoeur calls "quasi-plots," "quasi-characters," and "quasi-events" which points to the analogical character of historical categories.

Thus, we can see that for Ricoeur, the attempts at anti-narrative history are far from a complete rejections of the intrinsic narrativity of historical existence but a deepening and broadening of the possibilities for our very experiencing of this temporality. This might seem to be a 'catch-all' solution to the challenges fo the anti-narrativists in that no attempt to efface narrative from historiography will be taken at face value and can always be said to issue in further narratives. In some ways, Ricoeur responds to this by considering the possibility that the narrative response to time may be mere fiction in that it consoles in response to discordance and may be merely the sum of fictions which we accept as human nature. This suspicion oscillates with the belief that such a response is not arbitrary insofar as it answers the need of which we are not masters, to give order and meaning to chaos, non-sense and discord.

Ricoeur notes Benjamin's pessimism that the end of the era of narration may come because human beings no longer have experience to share. (TN,2,28) There may be other ways of being in which the solace of history would play a different part or no part at all but Ricoeur regards such life-forms with suspicion. As we have seen, such a position for White is itself to be automatically distrusted, for the transformative elements in narrativity which Ricoeur so values, and which he connects with the search for concordance as an "unavoidable assumption of discourse and communications", (TN,2,28) are more likely to possess, like any other apparently essential quality of human nature an ideological, socializing dimension masking some appeal to power. Ricoeur's apprehension at the possibility of the end of narrative has to be seen as one born out of a distrust of those disciplinary, bureaucratized

power structures that squeeze out the very meaning and possibility of experiencing the world in a narrative way.

What has been ruled out according to White, is what Ricoeur fears may reappear, the sense of the possible meaninglessness of history, and of human life. White questions the role of narrative as the natural mode of presentation for all serious formulations within a discipline. The orderly meaningfulness of narrativity is implicated in the repression of the potential sublimity of the field of history as an essentially meaningless chaos. This does not imply a call for some sort of anti-narrativism that might escape the ideology, discipline and constraints of linguistic and social productions. White insists that it is our awareness of the human power to construct realistic images, such as histories, and of the choices involved in doing so, that he wants to foster. Possible visions of the past far outnumber those sanctioned by the historical discipline. Although Ricoeur's metaphysics of narrativity rests on the assumption that human experience of temporality is deepened by and reaches language in narrativity and echoes White's call for multiplicity, the emphasis is still upon a bringing of coherence and unity to what Ricoeur himself acknowledges as an experience of time that is ultimately mysterious and, at its limit mute and unformed. In the face of a radical Nietzschean intellectual honesty that views order and coherence mere consolation in the ultimate face of death, Ricoeur holds that in spite of everything such order is our homeland. (TN,1,72) This, as he might say, is his own personal wager and faith. Narrative consonance from this perspective is a violent interpretation upon temporal dissonance, which as a poetic response to the aporia of time can never be a complete resolution of the predicament but a preservation of it in all its paradox. Just as there might always be something more to say (and this applies

to Ricoeur's own narrative about the struggle between time and narrative) this possibility of retelling rests upon the ultimately disintegrative power of cosmic time conceived as that which radically negates human time. And yet even here we remain within the circle of narrative that is the story of the impossible and futile task of ever achieving absolute transparency about the human condition.

The attractions of the narrativisation of history as opposed to merely documenting discursive formations in a scientific manner can be clearly seen in Ricoeur's appeal for comprehension and coherence. This is the creation of a domain in which orientatation in, and control of a thrown existence, that at its limit remains mute and mysterious, is made possible by the linkage of this thrown existence to the projective horizons of the future through the initiative of the present.[43] This structure is preeminently a structure of action in which the future is the privileged *ekstasis* of temporality because action, from this perspective, is predominantly a teleological phenomena. The privileging of the future thus goes hand in hand with the attempt not only to bring meaning into a thrown existence but also to recapture this thrown inheritance for the purposes of forging a future under human control. This has been the dominant understanding of ethical and political practice in the modern West associated with the achievement of practical ends in the world. That this understanding can be challenged and indeed the privileging of the future disputed is a important theme of postmodernism. I will argue that Foucault's constant attempt to disengage from this ultimately teleological structure is part of this postmodern sensitivity about the

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[43] I would compare this notion to something like Hans Blumenberg's understanding of myth as a response to the problem of the 'absolution of reality'. See Work on Myth, tr. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1985).

future conceived of as fulfilment of a deficient present. However, as with Ricoeur's doubts about the possibility and ethical desirability of completely dechronoligizing historiography, I will argue that this impulse in Foucault has ultimately to be seen as a deepening rather than a purifying of historical existence. Insofar as the "responsibility to act" is an important field where this deepening takes place it cannot be simply subordinated to the "responsibility to otherness" which aims at dismantling the action-orientated frameworks of traditional ethics and politics.[44] The argument that such attempts at intensifying our relationship to historical existence are themselves misguided and illusory rests upon the belief that history has little to do with human intentions, beliefs and values and that attempts to control its otherness through the appropriative web of narrative time are not only an impossible dream, but a deeply *hubristic* exercise. To assert this, however, is not to remain neutral to the question of history, it too is an interpretation with its own political and ethical effects.

In "The Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life" (an "untimely meditation" that we shall see reverberates remarkably in the latest of the German controversies about the purpose of history) Nietzsche argued that if one is to attempt to interpret history then one can only do so *"out of the fullest exertion of the vigour of the present."* (UDHL,94). At the same time Nietzsche recognized the possible stultifying potential of historical existence as a burden upon the present. In response to this he called for either the art and power of forgetting in which one encloses oneself within a bounded horizon, or the suprahistorical power to bestow upon existence the character of the eternal and the stable. It

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44. See S. K. White, Political Theory and Postmodernism, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 19-23.

is between these two extremes of a willed presentism bounded by its specific needs and interests and the transcendent power of aesthetic refiguration (which are perhaps not so indistinguishable insofar as they are both antidotes to the "malady of history") that a greater appreciation of Foucault's own historiographical enterprise can arise. Insofar as this understanding of Foucault is limited by the attempt to understand the purpose of historiography then it remains doubly bound. First, by the attempt to come to terms with historical existence which ultimately must be understood through its connection to the appropriativeness implied in the phrase 'coming to terms with history' and second, by the inherent teleology implied in the word 'purpose' which Nietzsche uses in order to break with the problem of knowledge in favour of life. Whether Foucault can disengage from these senses in order to provide a clearing for a radically other form of historiography is the question that guides this study. Ricoeur's preferred solution to this, in which our responsibility is to live and express the paradox and mystery of historical existence without resolving it in favour of one or the other extreme, also becomes more plausible in this light.

The real concern of Ricoeur's meditation on time and telling becomes clear in the final volume of his study. Here the philosophical bases of his work are revealed through his analysis of the philosophies of time of Heidegger, Husserl, and Kant and through a confrontation with the Hegelian temptation of Absolute knowledge. This debate with four major thinkers ultimately leads Ricoeur to a reaffirmation of his belief in the long detour of historical hermeneutics in order to provide an ontology of man.

Ricoeur believes that we have to think about history in full consciousness of the "event in thinking" that is the "exodus from Hegelianism". (TN,3,206) Even though we can no longer think in the same way Hegel did, we have, as post-Hegelian's, to acknowledge the powerful seductions of his thought. This impossible confrontation is something that many others have found to be indispensable in order to continue the practice of philosophy and has even led Habermas to claim, for example, that as regards the present major disputes in philosophy, we still remain contemporaries of the Young Hegelians. (PDM,51-5) For those, like Ricoeur, who have been particularly struck by Hegel's thinking the abandoning of its aspiration for totalization is felt as a "wound" that cannot be healed. Ricoeur remarks that he is close to Gadamer in this regard.[45]

For Ricoeur, Hegel's idea of "total mediation" does not exhaust the field of thought. Rather it can be seen as the other over against which a thinking that remains that of a "open-ended, incomplete, imperfect mediation, namely, the network of interweaving perspectives of the expectation of the future, the reception of the past, and the experience of the present, with no *Aufhebung* into a totality where reason in history and its reality would coincide", can define itself. (TN,3,207)

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[45] Gadamer argues in Truth and Method: "It is necessary to recognize the compulsive power of reflective philosophy and admit that Hegel's critics never really succeeded in breaking its magic spell". p. 307. For both of these thinkers it is impossible to simply refute Hegel through arguments that reproduce moments recognized and surpassed in his speculative enterprise. Gadamer's hermeneutics is based upon the anti-Hegelian premise that: "to exist historically means that knowledge of oneself can never be complete". (TM,269) He argues that: "The Archimedian point from where Hegel's philosophy could be toppled can never be found through reflection". (TM,308) Instead Gadamer renounces the Hegelian "absolute fusion of history and truth", and "the total opening up of our historical horizon,.. the abolition of our finiteness in the infinity of knowledge". (TM,306)

The question to be asked is, how far is a renouncing of Hegelian thought an actual intellectual position? Does Hegel not anticipate such positions and designate them as bad consciousness? If Ricoeur acknowledges the power of Hegel's thinking how can he so easily take leave of it as no longer a force for us today? Is this not just a historical phenomenon and one that is destined to be recuperated by the 'cunning of reason'? This problem is also to be found in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics which exists in an even closer proximity to the dialectics of Hegel, and which John Caputo has characterised as "the most liberal version of a fundamentally conservative idea" in which the Hegelian absolute is to be found in the transcendental principle of non-closure.[46]

Ricoeur takes the "strategic decision" to reverse the problem of the past as something to be recovered and to begin from the project of history, "from history as what has to be made, in order to rediscover in it the dialectic of the past and the future and their exchanges in the present". (TN,3,207) This decision is, I think, fundamentally correct. Firstly, it circumvents the age-old problem of producing historiography that re-presents the past 'as it actually was' and places the writing of history unequivocally in the present understood as a constellation of forces. Secondly, it emphasizes the preeminently ethical and political thrust of historiography insofar as it is inextricably linked to the sphere of human action and temporality. Thirdly, it provides the basis for a response to Young's characterization of history as an "irresolvable tension" that becomes productive in the writing itself. Young's sympathetic reading of the productive contradictions of historical

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46 J. Caputo, Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction and the Hermeneutic Project (Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986), p. 112.

theorists such as Sartre, Althusser, and Foucault, in terms of the effects their writing produces in the general dissolution of the transcendental categories of History and the West, is echoed by Ricoeur's understanding of narrative as deepening rather than resolving the complex dialectical relationship between narrative consonance and temporal dissonance. Following on from this poetic response to the aporias of time we can see that the present is not to be turned simply into a presence because it has a terminal position in the interplay of temporal perspectives. Rather it is to be conceived of as "the time of initiative". The present is the place where the past is "deposited, suspended, and interrupted, and when the dream of history yet to be made is transposed into a responsible decision." (TN,3,208)

It is this connection between historical existence as a response to the aporias of time in the field of action and especially communicative action that I propose to defend in relation to Foucault's own reflections upon the possibility of historiography, conceived of as an emancipatory process via genealogical dissolution. In Young's characterization of Foucault's work as an enacting of the "irresolvable conflict between history as meaning and history as difference", one can detect not only the predominance of the textual dimension of history as the place where the tension becomes productive but also the preeminent ethical thrust of such writing situated in the present. I wish to argue that this imperfect mediation in the field of action can be schematized through another dialectic that Ricoeur has proposed, that of ideology and utopia and that this provides a productive comparison with a reading of Foucault that characterises his understanding of freedom as that of the dissolution of identities and a refusal to universally endorse definite political projects.

Yet this is not to endorse wholeheartedly Ricoeur's hypothesis that "narrative is the guardian of time" and thus that historiography ultimately refers to the meaningful expression of human action within time. The unashamedly existential understanding of historiography which sees it as a response to the mystery of the encompassing immensity of time, which is also intimately related to its dispersive power, is tempered by the ultimately inadequate response that a poetics of narrative makes to such cosmological vastness and indifference. Foucault's challenge that the "time of discourse is not the time of consciousness extrapolated to the dimensions of history, or the time of history in the form of consciousness" (AK,210) is the clearest denial of the consoling possibilities of a narrative poetics in this respect. Yet this claim is itself situated within a narrative of dispossession that is echoed in an ethics and politics of renunciation. This is where Foucault's own historical narratives, such as the spread of pastoral power through the disciplinary matrix and confessional technology, draw their peculiar resonance in an age which has seen the increasing decline of the traditional meta-narratives of the West. Foucault has in this way contributed to the deepening of our understanding of history as a multi-layered and contradictory practice whilst addressing the concerns of the present in a way that testifies to Ricoeur's belief that:

> in spite of everything, it is necessary to have confidence in the call for concordance... and to believe that new narrative forms, which we do not yet know how to name, are already being born, which will bear witness to the fact that the narrative function can still be metamorphosed, but not so as to die. (TN,2,28)

An understanding of Foucault as engaged in the task of producing an experience of dispersal and dissonance in the face of modernity's search for unity and identity is therefore too rapid an analysis of the effect of

his work. This is not to deny that the ontological thrust of his thinking is towards the exposure of the 'other' that is consistently marginalized, devalued, and constrained by the powerful forces of the modern world. It is, however, to see in this strategy only the beginnings of a response to how to proceed once the pursuit of conflict, controversy, and dispersal have been reinstated into the interstices of intellectual and ethical action. That his discourse produces effects beyond those immediately apparent in his declared intentions is not something that would concern Foucault, indeed he would necessarily celebrate such a phenomena. That these effects were to include the search for new narrative forms that "coordinate distension and intension" (TN,1,73) and seek to answer the fascination for the radically unformed temporal experience via a nostalgia for order and identity, might begin to undermine his claims that "Discourse is not life: its time is not your time; in it, you will not be reconciled to death". (AK,211) It would be also to refuse the simple non-dialectical claim that the consonance of narrative is a fictive veil over the ultimate dissonance of life, and corresponding to this, that the formation of political, cultural and social identities are always constraints upon the real practice of freedom.

Ricoeur's thesis that narrative is a transcultural phenomena that "synthesizes the heterogeneous" can thus be contrasted with the postmodern and poststructuralist emphasis upon difference, singularity and otherness. Narrative becomes the shadow of this dispersive orientation and, despite Ricoeur's confession that the narrative response to the aporetics of time has its limits, these are delineated precisely by the search "by individuals and by the communities to which they belong, for their respective identities." (TN,3,274) Here identity formation is not simply a politically oppressive phenomena, even though it always

functions through marginalisation and exclusion. The task is to understand how such processes actually become the frozen pole of the dynamic and creative conflict between sedimentation and innovation, discordance and concordance that constitutes the pairing of tradition and utopia. Insofar as there is a privileging of the future in this dynamic of historical change, it might then seem that there should be a concomitant privileging of the practice of turning the solidified traditions and apparent unities of the present into the real dispersion of their historical constitution. Yet this is to misunderstand the nature of social change and to set up a one-sided notion of the possibility of social critique that itself marginalises the act of making inherent in narrativisation. It is this marginalisation of liberation as a process with ends, even though these ends are always contingent and ephemeral, that I seek to dispute in a reading of Foucault as a philosopher of disruption and transgression. Although this is a source of what David Carrol has called the "most forceful and contradictory aspects of Foucault's work:... the repeated play between limit and excess"[47], it nevertheless frames the critical power of his discourse in a limit to be further challenged. I shall also argue that this is imperative if the force of Foucault's historiographical work is not to be dissipated by the charge of epistemological contradiction whereby his theory of the implication of power and knowledge supposedly vitiates his political commitments.[48]

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47 David Carrol, Paraesthetics: Foucault, Lyotard, Derrida (New York: Methuen, 1987), p. 187.
48 See P. Dews, Logics of Disintegration, pp. 187-92.

Chapter 3

The Strategies of Dispersion: Foucault and the Dissolution of Memorative History

> The historian does simply not come in to replenish the gaps of memory. He constantly challenges even those memories that have survived intact.[1]

As we have seen in the preceding chapter, there is more to the narrative response to the problems of traditional historiography than the solution of epistemological and methodological disputes. As is apparent in the work of White, the narrativist study of historiography seeks to emphasize its ethical and political implications in the face of the neutral objectivism aspired to by analytical and empiricist historiography. This is a concern of poststructuralist critiques of traditional history too, but without, for example, Ricoeur's faith in the emancipatory potential of memorative existence. In this chapter I will consider Foucault's own practice of historiography in which the recuperative model even in the modified form of a finite hermeneutics of historical consciousness is radically challenged in the pursuit of an aesthetics and politics of dissolution. This I will argue is an undermining of the ordinary understanding of history as recollection and remembrance which cannot effect a complete reversal without contradiction. Although the injunction to remember in order to facilitate the formation of identities that challenge existing ones is far from constitutive of freedom; neither is the dismantling of identities and experiences in the form of an endless transgression a sure road to the practice of freedom. In the last two sections of this chapter I wish to bring out this limitation through a discussion of Nietzsche's reflections upon history as memory and the creative power of active forgetfulness in order to set up a contrast with Foucault's avowedly more austere understanding of the possibilities of

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[1] Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982), quoted in David Lowenthal, The Past is a Foreign Country (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) p. 22.

history as dissolutive rather than refigurative freedom. This will then serve as a link with the comparison of Foucault's notion of freedom and that of a more traditional critical theory which sees the lack of normative foundation (or more properly orientation) as a serious lack in the plausibility and coherence of a transgressive genealogical historiography.

Dreyfus and Rabinow in their influential study of Foucault argue that his work is divided into two main phases: the archaeological and the genealogical. The archaeological phase is according to their thesis distinguished by the influence of structuralism from which Foucault finally wrested himself when he came to thematize the problem of power.[2] Although Dreyfus and Rabinow are careful to avoid structuring Foucault's work in a systematic way, it is clear that they see his peculiar strategy for understanding human beings as evolving from the quasi-structuralist discourse analysis of the sixties to the diagnostic, genealogical tracing of power relations. This development in Foucault's methodology they term "interpretative analytics" by which they intend to signify that it is beyond both the hermeneutics of suspicion as well as structuralist theory. Foucault's method is interpretative but not hermeneutic in the sense of seeking a deep truth or hidden meaning about human nature or society. I shall question the possibility of going beyond hermeneutics and whether in fact Foucault can be said to be engaged in such a strategy in chapter four. In this chapter, however, I wish to raise the question of whether Foucault's work represents a coherent approach to the question of historical existence or whether it does indeed serve to articulate history as a contradictory concept and thus seek productive strategies through the undecidability of the

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[2] See BSE,104-5, see also PK,105.

interpretative process. This will go some way to answering Dreyfus' and Rabinow's claim that interpretive analytics is beyond the hermeneutic process and in itself a wholly distinctive approach to the diagnosis of cultural problems. It will also enable a clearer understanding of how Foucault's work lies at a tangent (rather than in opposition) to the critical theory of society developed by Habermas and yet cannot effectively be reincorporated into the normative demands of social theory based upon universalist regulative ideals. (see chapters 4 and 5)

A division of Foucault's work into distinct phases and interests should not be seen as so well defined as to merit study for its own sake. At the same time it would be wrong to treat them as either an evolving sequence or highly complementary modes of analysis. Rather, the lack of a single doctrine to unify his work and its tendency to engage new strategies and areas of research, should be seen as a symptom of the genuine impossibility of ever completely understanding the social practices in which one is participative. This impossibility testifies to Gadamer's assertion that: "The interpretation of the common world in which we participate is certainly not in the first place the objectifying task of methodical thinking."[3] Foucault's major archaeological work, The Order of Things, is an attempt to analyse the different modes of being of truth in order to show the historical disconnectedness of the different *épistemes* of the Renaissance, the Classical Age and the Modern Age. This phase culminated in The Archaeology of Knowledge, a summation of his previous work, in which Foucault defined his project as "a pure description of discursive events". (AK,7) Archaeology's task is to make a "structural analysis" of discourse considered as "events and functional segments gradually coming together to form a system."

[3] H. G. Gadamer, "The Hermeneutics of Suspicion", p. 64.

(BC,xvii) Its main adversary is the ill-structured domain of the history of ideas but far from setting up a new methodology, a discourse on discourse, it ultimately stands as a destruction of all attempts at a scientific description of knowledge. In this respect, Foucault's inaugural lecture at the *Collège de France*, indicates the uses of the archaeological machinery with its emphasis upon discourse as "the power which is to be seized" rather than simply described. (OD,67)

Genealogy in its self-reflective understanding as a discourse with its own specific effects can be said to bear far greater possibilities fo political action than pure archaeology. In its focusing upon the interdependence between systems of truth and the functioning of power it attempts an articulation of the "political regime" of the production of truth which Foucault believes has enormous implications for the vaunted value-free aspirations of the human sciences. Where genealogy converges with archaeology is in its disturbance of what is thought to be unified and eternal. This is what might be termed Foucault's principle of dispersion. If one were to proffer a unifying element in Foucault's work then it might lie in this principle, except that such coherence, as remarked above, is a violence to the texts that bear his name.[4] Ultimately, I will argue that Foucault's work, as it bears upon historical existence becomes questionable when this principle is given unwarranted stress for its own sake in order to avert the dangers of providing a meta-narrative of historicity. That the kernel of Foucault's philosophy can be found in the effects of this principle is a common theme of commentators from Rajchman to Rorty. I will argue that although this is an important element of Foucault's work and saves him from merely

[4] The notion of authorial coherence is of course problematized by Foucault himself and thus, the charge of violence here would surely have to be taken as an ironic one. See "What is an Author?" in LCP.

being Habermas's pessimistic relativist unable to reflect upon his own methods and theoretical premises, it nevertheless remains itself in danger of becoming a master name; a dominant strategy that refuses the possibility of positive and critical participation in the continuity of a historical hermeneutics shorn of the metaphysical guarantees of Hegelianism.

Initially Foucault's target for this strategy of dispersion is the history of ideas and its appeal to a continuous thread of change supported by the continuity of consciousness. In dispensing with the subject, archaeology attempts to isolate the level of discursive practices and formulate the anonymous rules of production and transformation for these practices. It seeks to examine the space in which objects emerge and are transformed and to describe "systems of dispersion" in which the subject becomes an empty function to be filled by historically changing individuals. Genealogy, in turn, focuses upon the forces and relations of power connected to these discursive practices. The archaeological level is still, however, an indispensable part of genealogical analysis and as late as the text "What is Enlightenment", Foucault insists upon their mutuality in the service of critique:

> In that sense, this criticism is not transcendental, and its goal is not that of making a metaphysics possible: it is genealogical in its design and archaeological in its method. Archaeological - and not transcendental - in the sense that it will not seek to identify the universal structures of all knowledge or of all possible moral action, but will seek to treat the instances of discourse that articulate what we think, say, and do as so many historical events. And this critique will be genealogical in the sense that it will not deduce from the form of what we are what it is impossible for us to do and to know; but it will separate out, from the contingency that has made us what we are, the possibility of no longer being, doing or thinking what we are, do, or think. (WE,46)[5]

There is no doubt that if required to be placed in the constraints of traditional academic categories, Foucault's work would have to be assigned to history. The category of philosophy does not so easily subsume his work for many reasons, not least that Foucault himself was suspicious of its claims to unity. As Pamela Major-Poetzl argues, philosophy for Foucault is dispersed into various practices: linguistics, ethnology, history, politics, science and it can no longer aspire to synthesis, its proper function being criticism, diagnosis, and demythologizing.[6] As with philosophy so with history, however. History for Foucault is far more radical a tool than the version practised by academic professionals. History "can evade metaphysics and become a privileged instrument if it refuses the certainty of absolutes" (NGH,87) and it is only in this incarnation that it avoids the synthetic desire of philosophy. Genealogy is a weapon that produces scepticism about the present and those histories that serve as justifications for the present.[7] This means that instead of treating the past as the seed-bed of the present, as part of a long continuous process stretching into the present, one treats it as radically other and emphasises its difference.

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[5] See also OD,73.

[6] Pamela Major-Poetzl, Michel Foucault's Archaeology of Western Reason (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1977).

[7] This also includes scepticism about the identity and actuality of the present in respect to a deficient past and future.

This methodological principle inevitably leads to an emphasis upon the ruptures or discontinuities of history.

Foucault's version of historiography is a curious amalgam of Nietzschean evaluation in a neutral almost positivist tone.[8] Genealogy is described as "grey, meticulous, and patiently documentary". (NGH,76) His arguments are presented at times with seemingly penetrative erudition and bring to bear upon the archive an incisive imagination and yet this patiently documentary style is in thrall to a much wider project than the reconstruction of the past in its difference.[9] At the beginning of Discipline and Punish Foucault asks why write a history of the prison? His answer is the key to understanding the attempt to fuse Nietzsche and meticulous research into a Gay Science:

> Simply because I am interested in the past? No, if one means by that writing a history of the past in terms of the present. Yes, if one means writing the history of the present?[10]

Genealogy is a "history of the present", that is, history written in the field of power relations and political struggles of the present and as such is an attempted intervention into the contemporary situation. It is thus Nietzschean reevaluation that takes precedence over re-presenting the past as it actually was. Not that there remains any vestige of belief

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8 See OD,73.

9 The problem of how one can historically reconstruct difference and avoid its recovery into the Same is central in appraising Foucault's success at producing this initial archaeological distanciation, however. Derrida's critique of this strategy in Madness and Civilisation, remains a important stage in evaluating Foucault's connection of the genealogical mapping of suppressed and marginalized knowledges and struggles and the articulation of concrete and limited freedoms. See J. Derrida, "Cogito and the History of Madness" in Writing and Difference, tr. with an Introduction and Additional Notes, by Alan Bass (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978).

10 DP,9

in the possibility of an accurate representation of the past. To judge his works solely by the traditional historiographical criteria of such aims would be to miss the point. Foucault does not wish to represent the past as it actually happened in the first place, because he believes that such a desire is not only unachievable but deleterious in its effects. Thus, even when his interpretations of the past are highly contentious and subject to historiographical criticism, their potentiality in terms of utility for the present becomes even greater. They in effect, have achieved one of their principle aims, the *marking of conflict* as the unsurpassable horizon of historical interpretation.[11] F. R. Ankersmit makes the same point when he argues that postmodernism is best illustrated by historiography in which:

> Historical interpretations of the past first become recognizable, they first acquire their identity, through the contrast with other interpretations; they are what they are only on the basis of what they are not. Anyone who knows only one interpretation of, for example, the Cold War, does not know any interpretation at all of that phenomenon. Every historical insight, therefore, intrinsically has a paradoxical nature.[12]

It is not just that genealogy unearths the repressed, marginal and forgotten aspects of the past and raises them to the status of historical knowledge. It also in this process functions as a deconstruction of the aspirations towards integration, synthesis and totality that have dominated historiography and which ultimately envisages the fitting together of the multitude of specific histories in a cartographical way to

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11 This would, for example, be the principle acheivement of I, Pierre Rivière, having slaughtered my mother, my sister and my brother, tr. F. Jellinek (New York: Pantheon, 1975), the historical study done under Foucault's direction at the *Collège de France*.

12 F. R. Ankersmit, "Historiography and Postmodernism", in History and Theory, vol. XXV III, 1989, pp. 142-3.

form one complete picture of the past. Genealogical evidence points not to the essence of the past but to "other *interpretations* of the past" which "gives rise to the question what a historian here and now can or cannot do with it."[13] This equally is not just that the most interesting evidence is to be found in that "which is not said, in what a period has not said about itself", but that which the present finds it cannot say about the past. Ankersmit summarizes this attitude neatly:

> The wild, greedy, and uncontrolled digging into the past, inspired by the desire to discover a past reality and reconstruct it scientifically, is no longer the historian's unquestioned task. We would do better to examine the result of a hundred and fifty years' digging more attentively and ask ourselves more often what all this adds up to. The time has come that we should *think* about the past, rather than *investigate* it.[14]

I shall argue that the attempt to produce a pure description of a discourse object through the disinterested archaeological methodology to be found at the time of AK, should not be taken at face value. Instead it must be seen as a decision to purge the traditional historiographical desire to reach the truth of the past. In this sense it is a tacit recognition that all such description occurs in a specific present structured by a multitude of powers, desires and interests that can never be fully articulated. The Nietzschean genealogist avows the polemical interests motivating her research and critique in such a way that ultimately it is not the historical text but the activity of writing history, or rather what that activity achieves, that becomes central. It is this practice of writing history that I ultimately wish to argue cannot simply consist in the attempt to disperse, to make heterogeneous and challenge the identities and continuities of the present in order to free

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13 Ibid. pp. 145-6.
14 Ibid. p. 152.

a clearing for suppressed and undisclosed possibilities. Although Foucault quite rightly points out the importance of emphasizing the irredeemable antagonism of historiography, this has to be sited within a horizon of historical understanding which takes that dissension as always already involving a moment of discrimination in which historical judgement also works toward comprehension and participation.

Following Rajchman, it is the dominant theme of historical freedom constituted through a denial of an unequivocal distinction between the fact of history and the fiction of the pure play of discourse, that I wish to present as the essence of Foucault's historiography. This, we will see, is ultimately bound up with the notion of genealogy as a constant transgression of constituted forms of power/knowledge in which there is always a tacit appeal to the subjugated and disqualified. (PK,81-3) Whether this strategy does in fact circumvent the hierarchization and marginalization of 'globalising discourses' or sets up its own, no doubt mobile, but nonetheless functional, ranking of the dispossessed is a central question. If Foucault has taught us to ask from what position in the systems of power/knowledge a particular discourse emanates, and what authority it claims in relation to the limits of this system, then this must apply to his own subversion of the limit between the Same and the Different. Can there be a transgressive philosophy of difference that does not cross out its own limits in an interminable circle? Or is it possible to conceive the play of ateleological transgression in a way that avoids valorising difference and resistance for themselves?

It is the critique of traditional history of ideas in AK that presents us with an understanding of what Foucault's theory of history is not. Equally, it is in the unashamedly Nietzschean text "Nietzsche, Genealogy,

"Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" that we are presented with a picture of what history must perform if it is to be critical and "effective". It is around these two texts that I shall base my analyses of Foucault's historiography, beginning first with the 'Archaeology'.

(i) Archaeology and the Dismantling of Continuous History

Twentieth century French historiography, especially that of the *Annales* school tracing its lineage back to the structural-functionalism of Durkheim, formulated much of the intellectual tools that Foucault used in the subversion of their ultimately traditional historiographical aims of articulating the past in an intelligible way.[15] These included concepts of threshold, displacement, redistribution, and transformation, all concerned with the structure of a field and with the process of restructuring which produces discontinuous change marked by sudden shifts, ruptures and systematic rearrangements. Critical of narrative history and viewing change not as progress, regular development or continuity, but in terms of a need for other functions, or as a part of a process of structuring, destructuring and restructuring, the *Annales* paradigm articulated a project for a synthetic and scientific history and challenged the excessive emphasis upon political events within history. This involved a distinctly 'inter-disciplinary' approach which ultimately resulted in a diversification of theoretical concerns rather than a unified

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15 For an overview of the major trends in French historiography and the *Annales* school see, E. Le Roy Ladurie, "History in France", in Ideas From France: The Legacy of French Theory, ed. L. Appignanesi (London: Free Association Books, 1989), Paul Ricoeur, The Contribution of French Historiography to the Theory of History, The Zaharoff Lecture for 1978-79, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), and also T. Stoianovich, French Historical Method: The *Annales* Paradigm (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976).

methodological paradigm. Subsequent generations of *Annales* historians have attempted to include psychology, linguistics and anthropology in the writing of history and produced a dazzling array of objects of historical concern.

Fernand Braudel's analysis of temporal changes was one of the most well known innovations of *Annales*' historiography.[16] This was his seminal distinction between three main varieties of historical time: '*temps geographique*', in which change is almost imperceptible and consists of slow cyclic regularities; '*temps social*', which deals with shifts in economic and social structures to produce a slowly rhythmic history, and '*temps individuel*', which consists of transitory, disjointed daily events; the events of traditional political history. Braudel sets out his criticism of traditional history of events thus:

> We must beware of that history which still simmers with the passions of the contemporaries who felt it, described it, lived it, to the rhythm of their brief lives, lives as brief as our own. It has the dimensions of their anger, their dreams, and their illusions.[17]

In his inaugural lecture given to the *Collège de France*, Braudel had announced the task to "get beyond this first stage of history" which is "an authentic philosophy of history."[18] The decisive step to be taken is the transcendence of the individual in history:

> we are against Treitschke's proud and unilateral declaration: 'Men make history.' No, history also makes men and fashions their destiny - anonymous history, working in the depths

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16 F. Braudel, The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Phillip the Second, tr. Sian Reynolds (New York: Harper and Row, 1972-4, 2 volumes).
17 Ibid. Preface.
18 F. Braudel, On History, tr. Sarah Matthews (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1980), p. 11.

> and most often in silence, whose domain, immense and uncertain as it is, we must now approach.[19]

In OD, Foucault points out that although such historiography emphasizes structures over events, it does not reject events completely; instead there is a constant enlarging of the field of events, an endless uncovering of new layers of phenomena in order to establish those diverse, converging and sometimes divergent but never autonomous series that enable us to circumscribe the 'locus' of an event, the limits to its fluidity and the conditions of its emergence:

> History as practised today does not turn away from events; on the contrary it is constantly enlarging their field, discovering new layers of them, shallower or deeper. It is constantly isolating new sets of them, in which they are sometimes numerous, dense and interchangeable, sometimes rare and decisive:... Of course, history has for a long time no longer sought to understand events by the action of causes and effects in the formless unity of a great becoming, vaguely homogeneous or ruthlessly hierarchised; but this change was not made in order to rediscover prior structures, alien and hostile to the event. It was made in order to establish diverse series, intertwined and often divergent but not autonomous, which enable us to circumscribe the 'place' of the event, the margins of its chance variability, and the conditions of its appearance. (OD,68)[20]

During the sixties Foucault's worked out an archaeological method that can be seen as a response to precisely the type of history which attempts to recover the meaning of the past in its authentic actuality and place man at the centre of its intelligibility. The prevalence of structuralism obviously influenced Foucault's attempts to purify his analyses of the kind of hermeneutical interpretation of meaning that

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19 Ibid. p. 10.

20 Similarly Ricoeur argues that "Braudel's art,... is to structure his history of events - and his history is not lacking in dates, battles, and treaties - not by dividing them into periods, as all historians do, but by reanchoring them in structures and conjunctures, just as he had previously called upon events in order to attest to the structures and conjunctures." (TN,1,213).

stresses the constituting role of man in discourse and which, he claims, ultimately leads to the "patient construction of discourses about discourses, and to the task of hearing what has already been said." (BC,xvi) Despite his later vehement denials that he ever was a structuralist·[21] it is fair to say that the intellectual currents of the time exerted a considerable influence upon this attempt to produce a "structural analysis", (BC,xvii) "purged of all anthropologism", (AK,16) of social, political, institutional, and discursive practices:

> In that area where, in the past, history deciphered the traces left by men, it now deploys a mass of elements that have to be grouped, made relevant, placed in relation to one another to form totalities.... in our time history aspires to the condition of archaeology, to the intrinsic description of the monument. (AK,7)

In OT Foucault concentrates on relatively short spans of underlying continuity. The goal of such history is, however, similar to that of the *Annales* in that it aims to sever the humanistic narrative threads of traditional historiography and bring about a greater discipline in the analysis of the history of ideas; an area of history peculiarly prone to explanation in terms of great events and the genius of individuals. Along with the *Annales* historians he shares the common problematic of how to constitute series, to define the elements and formulate the laws of series, and to describe the relations between different series.[22] The formation of specific discourses such as natural history, and its relation to other discourses, (general grammar, and the analysis of wealth in the same period), are more important than the development of natural history into nineteenth century biology or the development of the analysis of wealth into nineteenth century political economy and

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21 See OT,xiv.
22 See AK,7-8.

twentieth century ethnology. Behind this analysis is the hypothesis that there can be found no continuous progress in such apparently related disciplines. Rather, Foucault's proposal of underlying *épistemes* that structure the organization of such disciplines and their connetions with other fields and which are transformed when the whole space of knowledge is transformed, is designed to thwart any simple delineation of a long march of progress even in the apparent interconnected search for truth and knowledge that is science. In the great transformations of *épisteme* there are many causes, including of cause non-discursive ones, but archaeology does not attempt to propose a unified systematic explanation of such transformation. Rather:

> The role of such a discourse (archaeology) is not to dissipate oblivion, to rediscover, in the depths of things said, at the very place in which they are silent, the moment of their birth (whether this is seen as their empirical creation, or the transcendental act that gives them origin); it does not set out to be a recollection of the original or a memory of the truth. On the contrary its task is to make differences: to constitute them as objects, to analyse them, and to define their concept. (AK,205)

AK is an attempt at analysing the way these fields of knowledge are structured through an analysis of the space determining their emergence. Instead of analysing this space in terms of genesis, continuity, and totalization, Foucault argues that one must understand it as the site of a material dispersion where regularity is of no more significance than irregularity, originality of no more concern than banality.

AK begins by rejecting traditional categories of history such as: ideas, tradition, period, oeuvre, author, book. The unity of the history of ideas which was principally derived from the transcendental human subject

and the assumption of progress in knowledge, is to be made problematic. This is because such unity emphasizes the importance of continuity in history ultimately issuing in notions of the teleology of reason and in the process of establishing such models there is an elision of the very real differences and ruptures that constitute the archaeologist's field of investigation.

Traditional history always seeks to resolve these gaps and differences by dissolving them into a continuous causal sequence, teleological design, or dialectical mediation. The gap between the past and present and the otherness of the past, its material estrangement, can never be completely appropriated present interpretations but this is always what traditional history seeks to do according to Foucault. It by definition, seeks to erase differences, and mediate the difference between past and present. In contrast to this Foucault conceives his archaeological machinery as the attempt to describe events or statements as they appear in relation to one another (rather like the way traditional archaeology carefully uncovers the artefacts of the past) without the consoling grid of an present oriented interpretation.

Change as a continuous linear process is clearly a concept that archaeology is designed to question. Along with this is a whole questioning of related conceptual apparatuses such as the "spirit of the age", "tradition", "evolution", "influence", the unitary notion of books, oeuvres, authors or for that matter disciplines such as psychology, medicine or biology. The relation that all these concepts share stems ultimately, Foucault thinks, from the notion that consciousness is itself unitary and transcendental in relation to the fields it traverses.

Foucault thus questions an entire network of related historical concepts which he sees as binding diverse phenomena too rapidly and preventing the real articulation of their contingent material relationships differences. Philosophical hermeneutics which attempts to preserve a distance between the present and history and attests at the same time to the very possibility of a "fusion of horizons" because of this very distanciation would therefore appear as an anathema to Foucault. The notion that one can comprehend the dispersion of history no matter how mediated this might be simply does not do justice to the real complexities of history. Moreover, the question of the actual material transmission of historical contents is reduced by the presentation of history as a story of difference within continuity. Foucault's insistence upon difference and rupture and the possibility of loosing the meaning of the past is one that attempts to approach the difficulties of historical existence and its reading without the reductive apparatus of "tradition" or "genius". We shall see in chapters five and six, how the concept of tradition does not necessarily have to lead to a elision of the complexity of change and how, following Ricoeur, it can be productively used to understand the dialectic of innovation and sedimentation (understood as utopia and ideology) that underlies all social practice.

Foucault's questioning aims finally at the conception of history as "total history" which leads one to suppose that:

> between all events of a well defined spatio-temporal area, between all the phenomena of which traces have been found, it must be possible to establish a system of homogeneous relations; a network of causality that makes it possible to derive each of them, relations of analogy that show how they symbolize one another or how they all express one and the same central core; it is also supposed that one and the same historicity operates upon economic structures, social institutions and customs, the inertia of mental attitudes,

> technological practice, political behaviour and subjects them all to the same type of transformation.(AK,9-10)

Such historiography seeks to connect phenomena if only along the chronology of point-like instants and the work of the historian is always to remove apparent gaps in the historical record. Total history is designed to re-member the past in a complete way through an interrogation of the disparate documents that come to light and a relating of them together in a unitary network of intelligibility.

The move from total to "general history" according to Foucault, is a changed relationship to this notion of the document as evidence of the past. General history does not seek to construct a complete map of the past in piecemeal and accumulative way. Instead it addresses the documents and evidence that become present as much more problematic in their giving access to the past. The desire for totality is in some sense renounced, both because of the implausible possibility of its achievement and because of the deleterious effects it produces through its promotion of an appropriative relationship to the past that issues in Ankersmit's "wild, greedy, and uncontrolled digging into the past". Sources, which are not "facts", must not be merely interrogated in order to decipher their hidden meanings or implicit essences, they must instead be invented in the sense that it is the historian's implicit choice of problematic that provides them with a distinct and intelligible identity. The notion of evidence undergoes a profound reorientation: "The problem that now presents itself - and which defines the task of a general history - is to determine what form of relation may be legitimately described between these different series." (AK,10) Historical evidence is not a representation of the past but material from which can be constructed varying events and series of events and more

importantly, made relevant to the pragmatic concerns of the present. As with the thrust of the *Annales* intervention, the emphasis is upon an alternative to narrow-minded empiricism. Where Foucault differs from the rather typical historiographical values of methodological exactitude and comprehensiveness embraced by the *Annales* paradigm is in his rejection of the goal of 'totality' that is implied by the project of a scientific history.

Foucault characterizes this change as one in which the treatment of monuments as documents gives way to the treatment of documents as monuments:

> History, in its traditional form, undertook to 'memorize' the monuments of the past, (to) transform them into documents.... in our time, history is that which transforms documents into monuments.... There was a time when archaeology, as a discipline devoted to silent monuments,.... aspired to the condition of history... in our time history aspires to the condition of archaeology, to the intrinsic description of the monument. (AK,7)

In opposition to the twin excesses of totalized and continuous history Foucault proposes a different field for archaeology:

> Once these immediate forms of continuity are suspended, an entire field is set free. A vast field, but one that can be defined none the less: this field is made up of the totality of all effective statements (whether spoken or written), in their dispersion as events and the occurrence that is proper to them. Before approaching, with any degree of certainty, a science, or novels, or political speeches, or the oeuvre of an author, or even a single book, the material with which one is dealing is, in its raw neutral state, a population of events in the space of discourse in general. One is led therefore to the project of a pure description of discursive events. (AK,26-7)

The object of historical analysis here, becomes "effective statements" which are always "finite and limited at any moment to the linguistic

sequences that have been formulated." (AK,27) Ultimately this analysis of statements is founded upon the question "how is it that one particular statement appeared rather than another?" (AK,27)[23]

Archaeological analysis is thus opposed to historical interpretation which sublimates discourse and works upon the assumption that the text must be interpreted for its hidden truth content. Foucault's archaeology proceeds by and evacuation of the transcendental themes that prevent analysis of discursive formations in their material dispersive existence. The historical *a priori* that Foucault postulates as governing knowledges in AK does not intend to the status of transcendence but seeks to articulate "the *a priori* of history that is given, since it is that of things actually said." (AK,127) The historical *a priori* does not impose a false coherence because it takes "account of statements in their dispersion in all the flaws opened up by their non-coherence, in their overlapping and mutual replacement, in their simultaneity, which is not unifiable, and in their succession, which is not deducible." (AK,127)

Ultimately, Foucault admits in the conclusion to AK that his discourse about discourse is groundless:

> (F)or the moment, and as far ahead as I can see, my discourse, far from determining the locus in which it speaks, is avoiding the ground on which it could find support.(AK,205)

Archaeology far from constituting a new science of discourse is an instrument for revealing the endless play of discursive formations, Foucault's not excepted. Against this avowal of indeterminacy, Dreyfus

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[23] Dreyfus and Rabinow characterise them as being "serious speech acts". (BSH,48)

and Rabinow's influential interpretation of Foucault's archaeological stage see it as a necessary but ultimately doomed attempt to step outside history and to produce a "transparent technical terminology" (BSH,97) that faithfully articulates a pure description of the facts of discourse. This they argue leaves him in a void because he avoids the serious truth claims and horizon of intelligibility that might give meaning to past discourse. This double bracketing is the methodological failure of archaeology because "like phenomenology it rests on the notion of a pure description" (BSH,85) that not only is impossible, but disallows archaeology from having any prescriptive social significance.[24]

However, there is more than enough Nietzschean rhetoric in the conclusion to AK to alert us to Foucault's strategy of disrupting rather than ordering history along the prescriptive regularities that govern discursive practices:

> Must we admit that the time of discourse is not the time of consciousness extrapolated to the dimensions of history, or the time of history present in the form of consciousness? Must I suppose that in my discourse I can have no survival? (AK,210)

Foucault finally displays the Nietzschean world-play of active interpretation in its true light at the very end of the book:

> Discourse is not life: its time is not your time; in it, you will not be reconciled to death; you may have killed God beneath the weight of all that you have said; but don't imagine that, with all that you are saying, you will make a man that will live longer than he. (AK,211)

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24 See BSH,89.

Archaeology's predominantly negative methodology aims to destroy the notion of historical progress and the traditional historiographical assumptions that sustained this. It:

> deprives us of our continuities; it dissipates that temporal identity in which we are pleased to look at ourselves when we wish to exorcise the discontinuities of history; it breaks the thread of transcendental teleologies; and where anthropological thought once questioned man's being or subjectivity, it now bursts open the other, and the outside. In this sense, the diagnosis does not establish the fact of our identity by the play of distinctions. It establishes that we are difference, that our reason is the difference of discourses, our history the difference of times, our selfs the difference of masks. (AK,131)

In this attempt to disperse the coherence and refuge of the Western myth of history it might be argued, as Dreyfus and Rabinow do, that Foucault overestimates the possibility and coherence of a detached metaphenomenology to end all phenomenologies. However, I do not think that such an extreme position can be attributed to Foucault despite all the talk of "pure description". Rhetorically his archaeological period is steeped in the reevaluations common to his later genealogy. It should be no surprise, therefore, to discover how intimately linked Foucault's description of Nietzschean genealogy and his previous archaeological studies are.[25] What remains undeveloped in AK and is made the explicit focus of the genealogical phase, however, is the role of power. Nietzsche as the philosopher of power becomes the dominant force in Foucault's next phase, heralded by the substitution of the term archaeology for the unmistakable Nietzschean term, genealogy.

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[25] For a discussion of the complementary relationship between the two strategies see Arnold Davidson "Archaeology, Genealogy, Ethics" in Foucault: A Critical Reader, ed. David Couzens Hoy (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986).

(ii) Genealogy as the Dispersion of the Present

Contrary to claims that Foucault is the "historian in a pure state" who desired only to practice value-free historiography (PDM,275) it is clear that one should not underestimate the Nietzschean maxim that there is only interpretation and nothing else behind interpretation that underlies his historical practice. We have seen that even in the seemingly quasi-structuralist prescriptions of AK[26] this underlying Nietzschean ethos bursts to the surface in the introduction and conclusion. In "Nietzsche, Marx, Freud" Foucault examines the methods of criticism instigated by these three radicals.[27] He argues that they can be seen as working from the basis that there is nothing behind the process of interpretation except further interpretation. Foucault implies that these new procedures of conceiving of the world, have inaugurated the *épisteme* of interpretation which has dominated the twentieth century. This is the ceaselessness of the hermeneutic process and the irreducible pluralism of interpretation. This view is most famously expressed by Nietzsche in The Will to Power:

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[26] AK has aroused varying appraisals from commentators on Foucault's intellectual trajectory. For example, Richard Rorty describes it as "his least successful" book whereas Jeffrey Minson's commends it precisely for its circumspection. See Richard Rorty "Foucault and Epistemology" in Foucault: A Critical Reader, p. 43, and Jeffrey Minson, Genealogies of Morals: Nietzsche, Foucault, Donzelot and the Eccentricity of Ethics (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1985), pp. 114-5.

[27] M. Foucault, "Nietzsche, Marx, Freud," in Cahiers de Royaumont, Paris 1967, tr. by J. Anderson and G. Hentzi, in Critical Texts III, 2 (Winter, 1986), pp. 1-5.

> Against positivism, which halts at phenomena -'there are only facts' - I would say: No, facts are precisely what there are not, only interpretations.[28]

With these thinkers the possibility of an hermeneutic centred upon the discovery of the reflexivity of interpretation is launched. Instead of a hermeneutics that attempts to reach a bed-rock by anchoring signs to an origin, the emphasis is placed (as in archaeology) upon an hermeneutics of the surface, focusing upon the explicit interconnections of signs rather than their references. Ultimately interpretation converts to an interminable quest where there is no absolute origin or goal that could act as a criterion for the determination of meaning.

For Nietzsche there is no origin of meaning. The practice of interpretation that attempts to burrow under signs to a more essential ground succeeds in unearthing only further interpretations. Meaning from this perspective results from the successful imposition of an interpretation. Signs are not in this respect prior to interpretations; rather it is they that are always already the effect of interpretations. Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud open up the era of the "malevolent sign" in which the sign is seen to be inherently dissimulating because it attempts to hide its interpretative character. The limitless realm of interpretation

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[28] F. Nietzsche, The Will to Power, tr. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), p. 461. Similarly G. Vattimo in The End of Modernity, nihilism and hermeneutics in postmodern culture, J. Snyder (Cambridge: Polity, 1988), argues that Nietzsche's accomplished nihilism implies that one has understood that nihilism is one's sole opportunity and that today we begin to be or are able to be accomplished nihilists. The notion of value is liberated in all its vertiginous potentiality and only where there is no terminal or interrupting instance of the highest value to block the process may values be displayed in their true nature, namely as possessing the capacity for convertibility and an indefinite transformability or processuality. It is here, in the emphasis on the superfluity of the highest values, that the roots of an accomplished nihilism may be found. The world has become a fable writes Nietzsche but because there is no truth that would unveil it to us as appearance, the notion of fable does not for that reason lose all meaning; instead it forbids us to attribute to the appearances that constitute it the cogent force that once belonged to the metaphysical *ontos on*.

that is thus unleashed is for Foucault the hallmark of the present and forms the basis of his own strategic intervention:

> The problem of the plurality of interpretations, of the war of interpretations, is, I believe, made strictly possible by the very definition of the interpretation, which goes on to infinity, without there being an absolute point beginning from which it is judged and is decided upon. Thus, the following: the fact that we are destined to be interpreted at the very moment where we interpret; all interpreters must know it. This plethora of interpretations is certainly a trait which profoundly characterizes Western culture now.[29]

In "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" Foucault discusses what a Nietzschean perspective on the past would look like in comparison with traditional historiographical ways of comprehending change. Instead of a focusing upon apparent momentous deeds and events genealogy is a careful sifting of the minutiae of history. It rejects the "metahistorical deployment of ideal significance and of indefinite ideologies" (NGH,77) for the play of interpretations, and the difference of history. This emphasis upon the "singularity of events" and the "relentless erudition" of genealogy forms the basis of Foucault's attempt to give an "analytic" of power (rather than a theory) through an investigation of the micro-practices of power-knowledge.

In opposition to the desire to seek an essence behind historical events that will bring coherence and direction to their multiplicity the genealogist marks the manifest diversity and discontinuity of the past. Genealogy is clearly dependent upon some notion of hermeneutics because the genealogist seeks to find the multiple interpretations of the past, what she does not seek, however, is a fundamental truth or essence to act as a measure of trans-historical judgement:

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29 "Nietzsche, Marx, Freud", p. 4

> If interpretation were the slow exposure of the meaning hidden in an origin, then only metaphysics could interpret the becoming of humanity. But if interpretation is the violent or surreptitious appropriation of a system of rules, which in itself has no essential meaning, in order to impose a direction, to bend it to a new will, to force its participation in a different game, and to subject it to secondary rules, then the development of humanity is a series of interpretations. (NGH,86)

The search for meaning in history has been fuelled by the desire to give meaning and direction to the present through a tracing of its development in the past. This practice is, in a sense, always one of legitimation and was one of the main reasons for the development of historical research in the nineteenth century. To be able to trace and grasp the direction of history is to be able to license contemporary practices, to make them appear justifiable within a progressive development.[30] Of course, the same delineation of a direction to history can be used to criticize those in power, Marxism being the classic example. Theories of history do not so much predict future historical change as justify a certain kind of political action in the present aimed at bringing about these changes. The whole effort to unearth meaning in history can be seen as arising from this desire to connect the present with the past in order to enable the legitimation of present actions and judgements. History here is the site of continuity and stability and presents the possibility of acting in a meaningful way through adherence to hidden or manifest principles.

Foucault disallows this as metaphysical. His notion of the historical sense thus appears counter-historical when compared with the Hegelian

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[30] A fine analysis of the historical legitimations of those in power can be found in Marc Ferro, The Use and Abuse of History, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984).

approach to the past.[31] Rather than producing continuity, it severs the present and its pasts:

> The search for descent is not the erecting of foundations: on the contrary, it disturbs what was previously considered immobile; it fragments what was thought unified; it shows the heterogeneity of what was imagined consistent with itself. (NGH,82)

The history of mankind is conceived of as a series of interpretations and genealogy is the task of articulating their appearance and disappearance. Interpretations (or coagulated discourse formations) are from this perspective, primary; there is nothing behind or beneath them except other interpretations. Genealogy does not assume a trans-historical perspective but affirms itself as just one more in the series of interpretations.

Foucault argues that there is a "ceaseless articulation of power on knowledge and of knowledge on power." (DP,27) Again, Nietzsche is the influence behind this undermining of neutral, objective knowledge. In "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History", Foucault contends that genealogy is not the study of origins but a disclosure of differences; a recognition of the dispersal that we are. Values do not develop from out of the past but emerge in a field of forces.

Genealogy sites the points of emergence of values in a 'non-place' between opposing forces, thus, indicating that the adversaries do not

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[31] However, it might be noted that Hegelian philosophy of history is itself subject to the emphasizing of ruptures and sudden upheavals in social formations. This, for example, is a reason why Althusser (an apparently most un-Hegelian thinker) has been criticized for his emphasis upon rupture and consequently been argued to be not so a-Hegelian after all. See Robert Young, White Mythologies (1990) and Gregory Eliot, Althusser: The Detour of Theory (London: Verso, 1987).

participate in the same space. For Foucault, genealogy is the articulation of history as a discontinuous sequence of interpretations. Genealogy is thus, a variety of history in its documenting of the justifications of power, an "effective history" as Nietzsche would have it, but it is utterly devoid of absolutes that might serve as the "basis for self-recognition or for understanding other men." (NGH,87-8) Its principle aim is to undermine the security of foundations, continuity, and identity, and place the will to know within the fabric of our desire to interpret:

> traditional devices for constructing a comprehensive view of history and for retracing the past as a patient and continuous development must be systematically dismantled. Necessarily, we must dismiss those tendencies that encourage the consoling play of recognitions. Knowledge even under the banner of history, does not depend on 'rediscovery', and it emphatically excludes the 'rediscovery of ourselves.' History becomes 'effective' to the degree that it introduces discontinuity into our very being... 'Effective' history deprives the self of the reassuring stability of life and nature, and it will not permit itself to be transported by a voiceless obstinacy toward a millennial ending. It will uproot its traditional foundations and relentlessly disrupt its pretended continuity. This is because knowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting.(NGH,88)

Effective history is a precarious counter-memory articulating the lack of foundations for existence and the alien otherness of the past which threatens to burst asunder our desire for identity.

In NGH, just as in the AK, Foucault gives an account of what he had done in previous works as much as a agenda for future research. The History of Madness, and The Birth of the Clinic, had already emphasized the importance of the discontinuous and the destabilizing. These quasi-methodological principles for historical interpretation are reflected on a meta-level by Foucault's style of siting his own historical works upon

possible fault-lines in contemporary patterns of experience.[32] His histories are thus effective insofar as they themselves contribute to the possibility of such displacements by exposing the limits of present structures of experience.[33] The movement from archaeology to genealogy is at once an attempt to articulate explicitly the inevitability of power in discourse and an attempt to rethink the role of the intellectual in relation to this inevitability and the struggles of the present. In doing so, however, it bequeaths the problem of the relativisation of knowledge that on an initial reading can only be subverted by a full-blooded embracing of Nietzschean philosophy of life or only somewhat half answered by a philosophy of hermeneutical historicity. It is with the latter approach that I propose to extend Foucault's legacy. Firstly, in order to answer the criticisms of his work stemming from placing it within the broader group of anti-Enlightenment, anti-modernist, and by implication, ultimately irrationalist thought. Secondly, in order to suggest the importance for historical existence of the principles his work accentuates. This is not in terms of methodological principles that if followed will provide us with an ever increasing understanding of our historical constitution and a superior ability to master this constitution and use it to serve our desires. Rather it is in terms of simply becoming aware of belonging to history before it belongs to us and a recognition that this unsurpassability is the source rather than the obstacle to freedom.

Foucault insisted that the study of discourses in the human sciences was important precisely because they are intimately related to the exercise of power. It is important to remember that his investigations of

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32 See AK, 130-1.
33 See OT, 386-7.

discourse before the supposed upheaval of 1968 were also largely taken up with the 'truth' (and consequently status and power) of the human sciences by analysing the historical conditions in which they had emerged. The aims and objectives of discourse aspiring to scientific status through the constitution of specific regimes of 'truth' was the principle object of Foucault's pre-68 studies and it is the power that accrues to such regimes that make the aspirations of this discourse so pertinent to the modern political situation.[34]

With Discipline and Punish, Foucault begins to analyse explicitly the connection between power and knowledge from the perspective of the exercise of power. He says there:

> We must admit that power produces knowledge... that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations.(DP,27)

It is this positing of an intrinsic relation between power and knowledge that has caused much misunderstanding about the possibilities for freedom in Foucault's work.

According to Foucault, power is not something that inhibits truth but something that actually produces it. Neither is power merely repressive but has to be seen as intrinsic to the facillation of action and the medium whereby objects of discourse are created. In other words it is relational rather than substantial. DP is an attempt to articulate the strategies that developed with the emergence of the prison in order to reveal their insidious continuing effect in the present. Resistance to the

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[34] See PK,115.

normalizing practices described in that book means resistance to the network of power in which the prison has existed:

> The meaning which bears and determines us has the form of a war rather than that of a language: relations of power, not relations of meaning. History has no 'meaning', though this is not to say it is absurd or incoherent. On the contrary it is intelligible and should be susceptible to analysis down to the smallest detail - but this in accordance with the intelligibility of struggles, strategies and tactics. (PK,114)

The genealogist's act of interpretation is a conscious attempt to foster change in a situation that is always already one of transformation. Thus, it is complicated by the paradoxical condition of working within a field of unanticipated and unintended consequences whilst at the same time authorizing the violence of a transgressive interpretation in order to impose a semblance of will-formation upon historical existence. This is itself understood as always a specious imposition of the will given that the world is always already interpreted and exceeds the genealogist's own intentions. The description of this situation as an engaging in the play of language might thus not be so far from the mark.[35] The notion of "effective history" becomes more concrete when we see that the desired effect of interpretation is the disintegration of our contemporary conditions of experience and knowing. This desired effect, however, is not something that can be achieved by a simple act of reflection, nor is it to be achieved in subjective isolation. At the same time the notion that genealogy is able to produce straightforward theoretical guidance for political action is also precluded. Even though genealogy (like historiography in general) aspires to document the minutiae and

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35 Cf. H. G. Gadamer, "On the Problem of Self-Understanding" in Philosophical Hermeneutics, tr. and ed. by David E. Linge (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), pp. 53-5 and Truth and Method, p. 446.

backwoods of the past, it implies nothing about the concrete content of change because future *épistemes* are unknowable. This is why an understanding of the mechanisms by which change takes place become so important, even if a complete knowledge of such processes is in principle unattainable. How different forms of power are exercised in various movements for change, and the various resistances to these movements, becomes a central problem for analysis. Crucially this includes a greater awareness of the way in which movements for social change produce unintended and unacknowledged counteractions. Such analysis does not provide the values that motivate change but does seek to provide a denser interpretation, one that may make action in the present more open to discursive legitimation even though the possibility of absolute vindication is forever deferred. Semiology and dialectics are abandoned because both have pretensions to the possibility of universal knowledge and these pretensions ultimately serve to elide the investigation of the specific connections of power and knowledge.

That social transformations in the past have been fragmentary and discontinuous also tells us something about how our historical sense should foster change in the present. Analysis of history if it is to be effective, must not only examine how power and knowledge are related but also situate itself in the present in accordance with specific strategies and tactics of resistance, and in accordance with another exercise of power. The emphasis on specific struggles, strategies and tactics here, is of course, a post-1968 phenomenon. One of the chief lessons of those events, according to Foucault's reading, is that the state or power is everywhere and in order to combat it without imitating its structure, one has to organize resistance at the micro-level. Here the role of the intellectual also changes (to the extent that the necessity of

linking intellectuals with a function begins to vanish). This emphasis upon the specific is a consequence of the rejection of a universal history and of an anti-representational politics that underlines the indignity of speaking for others.[36]

For Foucault, "the efficacy of dispersed and discontinuous offensives," (PK,80) such as anti-psychiatric discourses and attacks upon the legal and penal system are evidence of an increasing vulnerability to criticism of institutions, practices and discourses. Concomitant with this is the recognition of the restrictions upon such struggles that global, totalitarian theories have. Such theories have indeed provided tools for local research but at the same time this has undermined the theoretical unity of the discourse in question. Critique must at all times recognize the necessity for "an autonomous, non-centralised kind of theoretical production," whose "validity is not dependent on the approval of the established regimes of thought." (PK,81)

Accompanying this phenomenon is what Foucault describes as "an insurrection of subjugated knowledges." (PK,81) By this he means two things. First, there are the "historical contents" that have emerged to enable a criticism of institutions such as the prison or psychiatry. It is these historical contents that allow us to "rediscover the ruptural effects of conflict and struggle that the order imposed by functionalist or systematising thought is designed to mask." (PK,82) Second, by insurrected knowledges one has to understand "a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated." (PK,81) This would include knowledges such as that of the psychiatric patient, the ill person, and the nurse, which

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36 See the interview with Deleuze in LCP, 206.

involve what Foucault calls popular knowledge, (*le savoir des gens*). This does not imply that it is just common-sense but rather

> a particular, local, regional knowledge, a differential knowledge incapable of unanimity and which owes its force only to the harshness with which it is opposed by everything surrounding it. (PK,82)

It is through these disqualified knowledges that criticism is able to operate by taking issue with the "government of individualization"; that is, the practices and discourses which regulate and constitute individuals.[37]

For Foucault, it is this combination of assiduous, historical knowledge and indigenous specific knowledges that produces the force of critical discourses. In both cases each form of knowledge is really concerned with "a historical knowledge of struggles." (PK,83) What emerges from this is "a multiplicity of genealogical researches, a painstaking rediscovery of struggles together with the rude memory of their conflicts." (PK,83) These are principally opposed to the centralising powers which are linked to the institution and functioning of an organised scientific discourse within a society. It does not matter what form this organisation takes for it is against the effects of such centralised power that genealogy defines itself. Their ambition is to create a space that might at least allow one to produce "genealogical fragments" in the form of "so many traps, demands, challenges," (PK,87)

It might be thought that Foucault's emphasis upon discontinuity, fragmentation and division immediately limits the possibilities for

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[37] See the "The Subject and Power", afterword to BSH,212.

representation and communication in political life. Being able to speak for others becomes dissolved in the perspective of politics as the pursuit of small, specific interests that have hitherto been suppressed but might this not also weaken the possibility of such interests being adequately articulated? Certainly Foucault is aware of the danger of genealogy simply being ignored by the powers that be. The possibility and desirability of transcendent sites that relate specific struggles and strategies to ever wider and structured networks is abandoned as an illusion which forestalls the genuine democracy of the singular, however. Hence, there has to be a politics of diffused or dispersed struggles, for social holism is dangerous utopianism. On one reading this amounts to a deep suspicion of political participation that extends beyond small, local interests.[38]

The possibility of a universal participation in a political community where the freedom of each can co-exist with the freedom of all others, is something that Foucault's strategies seem to dissociate themselves from. The specific intellectual is called to work within her own immediate situation and develop specific interventions in the social structure that might ultimately work for wider transformation, although this is not guaranteed. There are, however, no universal justifications for the preferences that guide these interventions other than existential situatedness; she can not appeal to a human nature nor an equivalence to an object.[39] Foucault rather vaguely defines the political task under these conditions as "detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony... within which it operates at the present time." (PK,133)

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[38] See Michael S. Roth's discussion of this aspect of Foucault's work in his Knowing and History: Appropriations of Hegel in Twentieth Century Philosophy, (Ithaca, New York, London: Cornell University Press, 1988).

[39] However, see Foucault's answer to how his position differs from Sartrean existentialism in the Foucault Reader, p. 351.

The question that has been raised about the implications of Foucault's position here is what is the status of the new regime that one attaches to in this interminable process of social formation? Foucault does not wish to address this problem as it has traditionally been tackled. He says in an 1982 interview:

> For a rather long period, people have asked me to tell them what will happen and to give them a program for the future. We know very well that, even with the best intentions, these programs become a tool, an instrument of oppression.... My role - and that is too emphatic a word - is to show people that they are much freer than they feel, that people accept as truth, as evidence, some themes which have been built up at a certain moment during history, and that this so-called evidence can be criticized and destroyed.[40]

This worry about the co-option of programmatic resistance echoes the epistemological limits announced in AK in which nothing can be said of the next archive because one can only think from within one's present archive. The leap of imagination that is implied in the systematic restructuring of the present is to be cast into suspicion because of its dangerous utopianism and simplistic reversal of present conditions. We shall see in chapter six how this thesis about the dangers of considering the future as a radical rupture, an "absolute danger" in Derrida's phrase,[41] precludes a radical understanding of the present in which utopianism is reinscribed within the dynamic tension of the social imagination. In the next section I want to consider how this suspicion about the imaginative refiguration of the present is displayed in

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[40] M. Foucault, "Truth, Power, Self: An Interview", in Technologies of the Self, ed, L. Martin, H. Gutman, and P. Hutton (London: Tavistock, 1988), p. 10.

[41] J. Derrida, Of Grammatology, tr. G. C. Spivak (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 5.

Foucault's "austere" sexual histories which in turn suggest their own peculiar practice of historical existence.

(iii) An Aesthetics of Dispersive Existence

For Foucault, history has no meaning and no direction and it cannot be simply be given a direction by producing the events that are predicted in a Kantian manner.[42] He did not try to sidestep the issue of 'what is to be done?', however. On a pre-theoretical level one might say that he simply dissolved this question in his own performance as a political citizen. If one required normative inspiration from Foucault as an intellectual then it would be available from this source. The struggles he invariably wrote about and supported were anarchistic and yet no one could accuse him of being frivolously engaged in struggles he knew nothing about.[43] Political decisions are left to those who are involved in the conflicts of social life. John Forrester makes an incisive observation about the "humble and austere" volumes two and three of The History of Sexuality. This is the theory that Foucault was above all a "historian of the failures and intellectual crises of the present."[44] The failure addressed in his last books, according to Forrester, is the failure of the intellectual:

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[42] See Immanuel Kant "The Contest of Faculties" and "Idea for a Universal History" both in Kant: Political Writings, ed. with an Introduction and Notes by Hans Reiss and tr. by H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 176 and p. 51 respectively.

[43] For someone who takes the opposite view see, J. Q. Merquior, Foucault (London, Fontana, 1985).

[44] J. Forrester, "Foucault and Psychoanalysis", in Ideas From France: The Legacy of French Theory, Ed. L. Appignaensi (London: Free Association , 1989), p. 68-9.

> The domain here is no longer political or strategic. This is a moral quest, the *ascesis* Foucault talks of at the beginning of Volume two - an exercise of self-restraint, in which the style of the intellectual and the images of a freedom which is beyond the reach of interpretive recuperation were given up, without reluctance or nostalgia, in returning to Aristotle and Phidias.[45]

From this perspective, Foucault's later work seems to be attempting to understand how we have become subjects who desire to know to organise and master their lives. A critical understanding of the connections that have formed between our ways of knowing and desiring might help in this way to construct, not a foundation, but a framework for our action in the present. From this perspective, Foucault's turn to the history of sexuality is an attempt to reveal how we are constituted as subjects desiring control over the formation of such subjectivity.[46]

Foucault locates his histories of sexuality thus, what is at stake is: "knowing to what extent the work of thinking one's own history can liberate thought from what it thinks silently and to permit it to think otherwise." (HS,2,15)

> There are moments in life where the question of knowing if one can think otherwise than one thinks and see otherwise than one sees is indispensable for continuing to look and reflect. (HS,2,14)

This attitude is consonant with the notion that criticism is to put into crisis understood in the original Greek sense of to separate or divide signifying the idea of discrimination or decision. In ancient Greece, crises were moments of truth when the significance of men and events

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[45] Ibid. p. 69.
[46] For a sustained expression of this perspective see John Rajchman, Truth and Eros: Foucault, Lacan and the Question of Ethics (London: Routledge, 1991).

were brought to light.[47] As I have argued, a guiding aim of Foucault's work is to turn the present into the past to the extent that every present is thus called to judgement and revealed as an arbitrary constellation that one day will be adjudged to be eccentric. The turn towards a study of ancient sexuality can thus be viewed as part of a genealogy of morals, in which morality has little to do with how the self is understood. The difference between pagan and Christian morality is the difference in their strategies for forming an independent and free self:

> The evolution.... from paganism to Christianity does not consist in a progressive interiorization of rule, of act and of responsibility; instead it produces a restructuration of forms of the relation to self and a transformation of practices and techniques on which this relation was based.' (HS,2,74)

The history of sexuality reveals a way of life not determined or even conditioned by the attempt to follow a rule, but one that instead can be described as the cultivation of a style:

> Among the Greeks, the same themes of restlessness.... took form in a reflection which aims neither at a codification of acts, nor at a constitution of an erotic art, but in the establishment of a technique of living... The physical rule of pleasures and the economy it imposes are part of a whole art of the self. (HS,2,155-6)

Foucault's histories in this sense, offer us latent potentialities in the past which might allow us to begin to think, and live otherwise. They do not present models to imitate nor rules to follow, but possibilities that enable an awareness of how to generate other modes of being. They can be considered precisely as material for aesthetic inspiration understood as productive strategies of how to go on in the present. The

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47 See Randolph Stern, "Historians and Crisis", Past and Present, 52, August, 1970. See also J. Habermas, Legitimation Crisis, tr. Thomas McCarthy (London: Heinemann, 1976), pp. 1-3.

possibilities that are disclosed are not substitutes for deficient foundations but rejoinders to the historical givens we find ourselves situated within. This is essentially a negative hermeneutic of understanding in which the origins of the present are not sought as an insight into its intrinsic constitution but as a differentiation and counterposing that unsettles the established structures of tradition.

Foucault, finds in the Greeks the notion of morality as a style that might allow us to escape the demands of establishing universal values through the creation of philosophical criteria centred on the subject. This would involve an exploration of styles of existence as different as possible form one another as a point of inauguration for the constitution of specific individuals and groups.[48] The search for a form of morality that everyone must submit to categorically is in Foucault's eyes the very problem that must be surmounted. The reluctance to provide a criterion for judging change should, therefore, be understood as a refusal to engage in such a search. In this sense the limit one has to think against is that of the supposed naturalness of the search for universal criteria for morality. To imagine otherwise is to attempt the difficult dissolution of some of the more pernicious effects of this desire.

In The Order of Things, Foucault declares that thought "cannot help but liberate and enslave". (OT,328) Inasmuch as emancipation is inevitably succeeded by the constraint of a subsequent patterning of social relations one has a responsibility to dispute or transgress all orders, not in the name of a better order, but because opposition is the only choice, aside from absolute passivity, that one has. This means that one

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48 Compare Ricoeur's understanding of fiction as a laboratory of moral experiment in chapter seven of TN,3, "The World of the Text and the World of the Reader".

is condemned to the ceaseless controversion of the historical structures and experiences that one finds oneself entangled within and for historiography to acknowledge its place in the necessarily undecidable struggle of the political.

Thus, as Rajchman rightly emphasizes, Foucault challenges the notion that liberation has to be towards a specific state. Rather it consists of the practice of ceaseless detachment from the historical limits that form us. Insofar as this does not imply a radical break from our historicity it is not a utopian impulse. The future here, is rather "heterotopian", where the arbitrariness of the present is disclosed through its eccentricity in relation to a new system[49] This is the motive behind the attempt to 'disperse' prevalent notions of unitary phenomenon. The principle of dispersion thus functions throughout all phenomena including those of truth and reason and history is necessarily plural and partial.[50]

In OT Foucault points to the emergence of historicity as a mode of understanding and argues that 'History' is itself a product of history.

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[49] See the preface to OT, p. xviii.

[50] Charles Taylor argues that Foucault never really solves his paradoxical position on truth. As supposedly true descriptions of past discourses, the archaeologist's own utterances have to be exempt from the decision to treat truth as relative to an archive, *épisteme* or conceptual framework. This produces the dilemma of being both a impartial observer and an active social critic. Insofar as Foucault wishes to use archaeology to show that the humanistic sciences of man are artificial and dangerous forms of reflection. the social critic who treats the present as already past must pretend either to transcend any given historical standpoint or to speak from a fictitious future. Taylor argues that if the majority are still talking in the vocabulary of modern enlightenment humanism, then the identification of that discourse as degenerating can result only by projecting backward from an as yet fictitious future standpoint. The archaeologist may be correct in believing that people will not always talk in this way but in the absence of any analysis as to how they will or should talk, the critique of humanistic discourse becomes empty. "Foucault on Freedom and Truth" in Foucault: A Critical Reader, p. 93.

This means that history cannot provide an unquestionable ground for knowledge, and that historicity cannot provide an *a priori* privilege as the fundamental mode of being either. Foucault is not concerned to dispense with history but to make it an object of historical investigation and thus to question its presuppositions. In order to come to terms with the past one must confront its strangeness rather than seek for similarities and continuities so that it can be equated with the present and thus, in effect, dehistoricized. Indeed coming to terms with the past might be said to be itself a notion that appropriates the other of the past into the identity of the present. This is why Foucault argues that we are loath to think difference rather than the consolatory form of the identical: it is: "as if we were afraid to conceive of the Other in the time of our own thought". (AK,12) This is specifically revealed by the continuing dominance of the philosophy of the subject which provides a refuge for the sovereignty of consciousness against the intrusion of heterogeneity. Hence Foucault's turn to an investigation of the conditions of the emergence of the modern subject as the basis of knowledge.

For Foucault, the structure of totalization is implicated in the dominance of the theorist who provides an encompassing framework that enables the expropriation and control of the past whilst avoiding the issue of the situatedness that disallows any final totalization. In this sense the specific intellectual is a corollary of this historical situatedness where the answering of specific questions enables a partial discursive penetration into current practices and beliefs. Knowledge claims can never claim transcendence because they are made in relation to specific historical conditions which always elude the attempt to make them completely transparent.

Part of the problem, here, is that the task of re-presenting 'reality' is considered to be already a activity that legitimizes and privileges it and thus a task that is deeply inimical to the re-actualizing of the extinguished possibilities of the past. Foucault's histories, following the Nietzschean understanding of historical purpose and meaning, we might say are 'fictions' insofar as they do not intend the explicit re-presentation of the past (although this is not to imply that they do not intend to refer to a past that was in the way fiction has no 'real' referent) That is to say, they do not aim to portray the past in the Rankean formula "how things actually were", rather they acknowledge their mythmaking function in the Nietzschean sense of history as something that propagates myths that will be useful in the present. Following Ricoeur's thesis about the interweaving reference of history and fiction we might argue that the disjunction between the ontological intentions of these two modes is not so clear cut, however.[51] If all historical discourse is recognized as a redescription rather than a re-presentation of the past and yet still constrained from arbitrariness by the "endless rectification" of the known and to be known documents, then Foucault's distrust of the desire to re-enact the past may be assuaged. Certainly Foucault's circumscribed respect for the documents as events of discourse, is conducive to this endless rectification.

In this notion of redescription the purpose of such a practice becomes preeminent. For Foucault, the useful redescriptions are those that will disorder order and turn the present into a past by: first, dissolving the supposed immutable nature of the past and second, by placing the perceived necessity of the present (that proceeds, in part from this

51 See especially the proposals in TN,3, chaps. 7, and 8.

tendency to solidify the past) and in part from the sheer presence of the present, in a relationship of contingency in regards to the future past of the present. "Effective history" here, is a breaking up of the present order that has hitherto enjoyed the advantage of an assumed historical legitimacy. As such it makes the notion of the present itself a fragile and contradictory concept which can no longer serve as the unitary base of historiographical research.

This is why the motivating purpose behind his later studies upon sexuality can be construed as essentially the same in applying this effective history to a subject often adjudged to be immutable. It is in this last project that a tentative answer to the question of the normative basis of Foucault's theoretical production is intimated. This is the notion of an "aesthetics of existence" in which one is faced with the task of producing oneself as a work of art. In his investigations into how the Greeks defined themselves as subjects of ethical choice around the erotic he makes problematic the current Western belief that in sex lies truth. Sex, far from being the centre of existence is shown to be one aspect of an ethics of concern for the self, though nonetheless still an object of moral concern for the ancient Greeks.

I do not think this study of the technologies of the self can be coherently presented as an alternative to ethics conceived of as a universalistic prescription, however. For this would ultimately be a repetition of the universalist demand for ethical groundings rather than a by-passing of its claim. Although Foucault does not intend it this way, the injunction to care for oneself becomes no less a universalist principle for social and personal conduct even though it is associated with the "art of life". It must be remembered in this context that

Foucault has no intention of returning to the Greeks and espousing their moral codes. The study of the past is a means of providing a medium for a critical challenge to the present. This is not just by making manifest the potential arbitrariness of present practices but by also exposing the future as always already open to construction and reconstruction in the present, and to remind human beings of their historicity and potentiality. So, although it is clear that Foucault does not advocate the Greeks as an alternative to the exhaustion of modern ethics he does seek to question present practices through a contrasting of them with past epochs. It is at this point in his own peculiar historiographical 'recovery' that the impetus towards narration in terms of a reconfiguration of the Western history of the self becomes manifest and where there is clearly a case for arguing that tacit normative values are being appealed to in order to initiate a shaking (*ébranler*) of the present. From a different angle, the sense of being at the end of an epoch and the suggestion of a new dawn that Foucault's discourse seems to promise and withhold at the same time, enables a kind of anti-narrative that is suspended between the thinking into the originary event of the Western tradition and the possibility of a sense of ending. This decision to place his own discourse in *medias res* (a desire he eloquently thematizes at the beginning of OD) may be considered no less an interpretative violence than the nostalgia that remains an ever-present feature of the *unheimlichkeit* of existence.[52]

On the other hand the fragmentary nature of his methodology also serves as an indication that any attempt to secure a totalized critical historiography will ultimately find itself caught between the tension of history as meaning and teleology, and history as difference and finitude.

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[52] See TN,1,72-3

Rather than be a obstacle to freedom, a situation of nihilistic *stasis*, it is precisely this tension that enables freedom to appear and for liberation to be seen as a process rather than a goal. This is the conclusion I think should be drawn from much of Foucault's shifting perspectives and equivocation over the epistemological status of his own discourse.[53]

We can see Foucault as a thoroughly nominalist philosopher arguing that nothing is exempt from the contingencies of historical constitution and yet, in the light of this turn to history problematizes the concept of history as something that is irredeemably caught up within the theoretical field of recuperation.[54] This is precisely the aporia that Ricoeur places at the centre of historical hermeneutics when he addresses Augustine's claim that the human body is undone; that human existence is in discord in so far as it is a temporal rupturing and exploding of the present in contrast to the eternal presence of God.[55] As we have seen in chapter two, to this reading of existence as dispersion, Ricoeur opposes Aristotle's theory of emplotment as a way of unifying existence by retelling it. Narrativity can be seen in terms of this opposition: the discordance of time and the concordance of its telling. History begins and ends with the reciting of a tale and its intelligibility and coherence rest upon this recital. This does not require that the poetics of narrative resolves the aporias of time, however. It does not imply that one passes from the "notion of narrative identity to that of the idea of the unity of history"; but neither does it mean that ultimately narrative is a fictionalization spread over the dispersion of existence. Ricoeur's analysis aims to show how the narrative structures

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53 Ian Hacking makes a similar point in his article "Self-Improvement", in Foucault: A Critical Reader, pp. 238-9.

54 See Rajchman's presentation of Foucault's historical nominalism in MFFP,50-60.

55 TN,1,21.

of history and of the story operate in a parallel fashion to create new forms of human time and therefore new forms of human community. It is an attempt to reinstate creativity as a social and cultural act and to respond to the strand of postmodernity which emphasizes the demise of tradition as well as modernity.[56]

The question of history's relation to totalization is one of the central problematics for both Foucault and Ricoeur. It is from the perspective of a vigorous critique of historicism and its relation to the operations of knowledge and power that the distrust of totalizing systems of knowledge arises. The quest for the singular, the contingent event which by definition refuses all conceptualization, can be related to the project of constructing a form of knowledge that respects the Other without absorbing it into the Same.[57] This attempt to affirm the exteriority of the Other necessarily calls into question the construction of narrative as the story of subjectivity and the unfolding of consciousness in time. However, the argument that history cannot be weaved into a single, coherent meaning is not therefore an endorsement of the notion that it has no meaning at all. This would merely be a repetition of the structure of the Same in the form of a bad infinity of absolute sameness.

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56 Richard Kearney has developed the importance of this productive imagination in relation to the poststructuralist challenge to ethics and politics in his The Wake of the Imagination (London: Hutchinson, 1988) where he argues that the gravest error of anti-historical postmodernism is to neglect the hermeneutical task of imaginative recollection and anticipation.

57 See the article by H. D, Harootunian, "Foucault, Genealogy, History: The Pursuit of Otherness" in After Foucault, ed. Jonathan Arac (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988), for a sympathetic discussion of this desire.

Richard Rorty argues that Foucault eludes the irrationalist category he is so easily placed in because he rejects epistemology altogether. This is in the best tradition of Rorty's edifying philosophers who are:

> reactive and offer satires, parodies, aphorisms. They know their work loses its point when the period they were reacting against is over. They are *intentionally* peripheral... Great edifying philosophers destroy for the sake of their own generation.[58]

The principles of Foucault's Nietzschean genealogy are negative rather than positive. The negative paradigm that is offered to historian consists of cautions against the reductive concepts of progress, rationality, teleology, freedom, and necessity. Rorty's argument is that since the critical principles are negative they do not constitute a methodology as traditionally conceived. This is, however, to conceive of methodology as a purely positive prescriptive practice that issues in a rich return of historiographical material. Quite apart from the problem of how one is able to conceive of such a purely positive methodology if there are no inverse principles intrinsic to its working, Foucault does in fact have in some sense positive principles that are correlated to his negative ones. These would include an emphasis upon singularity and the event, upon difference and incommensurabilty, upon ruptures and breaks and upon specific or localised political resistance. Far from being simply negative themes or principles because of their apparent dependence upon their opposites such as universality, commensurability, coherence and totalization, they are actually principles with an equal demand for attention in historiography. In the light of their marginalization, Foucault is in some sense clearly concerned to bring such principles to prominence in historical investigation. More radically, however, he can be

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58 Richard Rorty, Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1980), p. 369.

seen to be problematizing the idea that a critical history can function by either one of these two seemingly opposite methodologies alone.

From this perspective he can be seen to be challenging the notion that all one has to do to produce a radical historiography is to invert the principles, (principally coherence, continuity, ideas of tradition and cumulative progress), that have served to make history throughout its existence in human culture merely a will to domination and domestication of the past. Such an inversion is not viable because it does not really challenge the idea that ultimately some form of recuperative history is necessary for social existence. It instead works within the categories of history without really questioning history as a social practice especially in its problematic form of writing. This is where Foucault's undermining of traditional historiography marks its most radical intervention. Foucault himself tends to obscure this questioning of the intellectual's role to the extent that some have found a major weakness to be his reluctance to acknowledge the position of the critic or investigator in the formation of knowledge.[59] Foucault's own practice as an intellectual belies this, however, especially in relation to his problematizing of the intellectual's potential for inducing emancipation through the production of theory. It would seem fairly inevitable that this suspension of the intellectual's power would be criticised by those thinkers who require a strong link between the intellectual's critical production and social and political practice. Foucault's alleged failure to provide a *raison d'être* for his project in terms of a liberatory impulse is from this perspective not

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[59] An exemplary case of this can be found in Susan Hekman's defence of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics in her book Hermeneutics and the Sociology of Knowledge (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1986), p. 173 where she argues that Foucault fails to account for the role of the interpreter and that the theme of reflexivity is not prominent in his work causing him to "misinterpret the phenomenon of human understanding".

a deficiency and certainly does not aim to question the possibility of such projective strategies. Rather, it is a position that recognizes that exclusion is always the consequence of such projections.

Rorty himself accepts that Foucault may have a hidden positive theory insofar as he is arguing that we ought to write history and do philosophy in the light of the possibility that the idea of convergence or an ideal speech community (the ideal totalisation of all cultures) may be a sham.[60] From this perspective the urge to tell stories of progress, maturation and synthesis might be overcome if we took seriously the doctrine that we only know the world and ourselves under such and such a description and that we just happened on such descriptions by chance rather than them being given by any evolutionary development, God, or Reason.

Where Foucault differs from Rorty is in his refusal to accept that the major descriptions that have just happened are thereby legitimate. It is precisely this 'just happening' that requires analysis because beneath chance there is really a complex intersection of forces that can be subjected to discursive penetration in the present. It is this unsurpassable belief in the penetration of forces and powers that we shall see in chapters four and five, leaves Foucault's work vulnerable to the criticisms of more traditional social theory.

Although Foucault belongs in the long tradition of rationalistic and constructivist historians who stress the constitution of the historical object, this sits alongside a romantic impulse to which genealogy attests; not only in its siting of the body as the substratum of history, but in

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60 R. Rorty, "Foucault and Epistemology", p. 48.

the conceding of the impossibility of ever constituting once and for all the object of historical research. Thus, positivist tendencies run beneath the aesthetic impulse to actively intervene in such a way that they can be described as the form of this very impulse. One might say that Foucault belongs squarely in the tradition of those visionary nineteenth century historians that Hayden White admires so much. Art and science classically interweaved in the discipline of history. This is not to be taken as a weak mis-match, despite Foucault's own often belligerent style of 'positivism'.

As we have seen, Ricoeur regards the poetics of narrative to be a legitimate and honest response to the dissolutions of time. Would it not be easy to place Foucault on the side of those who regard this response as a dishonest fiction and moreover contributing to the kinds of power matrices that have subjectified the body in restrictive ways? At one level this is obviously true, but Foucault cannot himself escape the charge of narrativism. This is not just the simple rebuke that his own histories are steeped in narrative devices in order to shock the reader into thought. No doubt a study of Foucault's narrative rhetoric would be highly illuminating. Rather the charge is that his ceaseless practice of anti-narrativism is itself a peculiar poetic response to the present and that this present is invariably (and perhaps too rapidly) considered to be one of crisis and dereliction.[61] What I have called the principle of dispersion in Foucault's work, functions in its own way as an ethically charged vision of the world and is intended to induce such an evaluation in the reader. Moreover, Foucault's work can quite easily be recuperated into the long philosophical tradition of challenging the

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[61] See Alan Megill's stress on this theme in his Prophets of Extremity.

ordinary understanding of time.[62] When one asks what the purpose behind this challenge is, ultimately one can only conclude that it is the recovery of difference and the unthought, or if one prefers, letting the Other be. Politically, Foucault never desires to go beyond the horizon that genealogy serves the disenfranchised, the marginal, and the repressed.

Now this is not to suggest that dispersive history is thereby another form of representational politics. Rather it is to suggest that, contrary to Foucault's inquietude about the value of intellectual work,[63] there is a unavoidable claim such work places upon 'ordinary life' as lived outside the academy. Foucault's writings have a potential utility, helping us to see the world in ways that we might not have thought otherwise, and this applies as much at the meta-level as it does in his specific histories. The fostering of a changed relation to historical existence in the specific field of historiography, cannot be insulated from ordinary understandings and equally it cannot be denuded of a certain utopian dimension. This is especially the case when the changed relation involves such a radical undermining of ordinary understanding. But of course, ordinary understanding does not just follow the postmodern relativisation of history and Western culture. Rather, in agreement with Young, we should acknowledge that the claims of postmodernists and

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62 The subversion of the ordinary understanding of time is it seems to me a philosophical tradition that can no longer function along the simple model of authentic/inauthentic precisely because it is this tradition that has contributed to a multiplicity of ordinary understandings of time and because these all interweave with the principle modalities of time as distinguished by philosophical analysis, such as the time of action, intersubjective time, mortal, finite time, and cosmological time. It is here that the effort to reinterpret the ordinary understanding of past/present/future can not be divorced from the notion of a double hermeneutic which allows for a mutual negotiation between philosophical interpretation and ordinary understanding.

63 See his comments in PPC, 14.

poststructuralists are so pertinent because of "the sense of the loss of European history and culture as History and Culture, the loss of their unquestioned place at the centre of the world."[64] One might say in this sense, that Foucault's vehement anti-narrativism, is only indicative of a wider phenomena. And yet it is in the service of a reevaluation of our relation to history that on a meta-level can only be characterized as passionately ethical and not ascetically concerned with simple self-transformation. To reduce this new relation to the interests of knowledge is short-sighted as Foucault insists, but similarly one cannot maintain that it is pertinent solely at the point of politics understood as an economy of power and force. With Ricoeur, I think we have to insist upon the equally intrinsic refigurative or disclosive nature of historiography as narrative. From this perspective one may say that the content of the form of Foucault's historiography is power, in that his style provokes and forces judgement, but that this nevertheless remains a limited vision, and it is precisely this limit which enables its critical force.

Finally the will to dispersion that characterizes Foucault's politicisation of time, memory and history, is a disenfranchisment of identity for quite specific purposes. These are a saving of difference and the articulation of the Other understood as the unthought and slaughtered of history. If genealogy is an instrument for those who resist and not a stage in programming, then how does one select research in the first place? At its limit this 'project' cannot but insist on the necessity of transgression moving ceaselessly on. But it might be argued that this will to dispersion is precisely utopian in its desire; a *hubris* that does not recognize that identity in some limited form is an essential

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64 Robert Young, White Mythologies, p. 20

phenomena in all politics. As a strategy of thought, genealogy escapes stricture, but then I do think it is in danger of being characterized (as Rajchman unwittingly argues in Foucault's defence) as scepticism. Rajchman intends to place Foucault's work at a certain distance from the philosophical tradition by doing this, but without characterizing Foucault's work as utterly inimical to freedom then I do not think he can succeed. Who would deny that scepticism is a necessary trait of critical thinking? My scepticism about Foucault's will to dispersion begins precisely here. It seems to be a mere tautology to characterise freedom as requiring constant vigilance and scepticism towards the entanglements of the world. Without the connection to ceaseless transgression in order to ensure that resistance can never become a victory, the will to dispersion does not seem so crucial for conducting necessary. Might one not say alternatively with Benjamin that the present bears an absolute continuity in its responsibility for both the fate of future generations and the suffered fate of past generations.

What is the impetus behind this privileging of dispersion? In the last two sections I wish to look at one of Foucault's ancestors, Nietzsche who first articulated the notion of "effective history" and "active forgetfulness" as important forces in existence and as antidotes to an overblown historical consciousness. The force of such strategies can be witnessed in their reverberation in contemporary German historiography and truly reveal their own peculiar historical effectiveness.

(iv) Nietzsche, Active Forgetfulness, and the *Historikerstreit*.

> "I undertake to let myself be borne on by that force of any living life: forgetting."[65]

Alan Sheridan concludes that Foucault "begins where all truly original minds begin, in the present."[66] Sheridan argues that Foucault's passion is to seek out the new, that which is coming to birth in the present and that his interest in the past is guided by this passion. Like his ancestor Nietzsche, Foucault is not the creator of a system but, as I have sought to argue, there is a certain coherence to his work in that it addresses our relationship to historical existence. Sheridan himself, sees a impetus behind his work stemming from Foucault's first book, Madness and Civilisation. This book and its thesis that modern rationalism and science have the same ignoble origins as the lunatic asylum, and that it is madness itself that originally gave objective knowledge a hold on man, provides the foundations of Foucault's enterprise insofar as it serves as a stimulus for a *"wirkliche Historie"* that actively intervenes in the present.

In "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life", the general possibilities of such a *"wirkliche Historie"* are set out by Nietzsche through an examination and criticism of the various forms of historical consciousness prevalent in his day.[67] His reflections were, as he himself acknowledged, "untimely". First because his conclusions about historical thinking and existence went against the grain of the nineteenth century's emphasis upon the problem of truth in historical writing.

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65 R. Barthes, cited in J. Culler, Barthes (London: Fontana, 1983).
66 Alan Sheridan, Michel Foucault: The Will to Truth (London: Tavistock Publications, 1980), p. 195.
67 Friedrich Nietzsche, "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life, in Untimely Meditations", trans. by R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

Secondly, because what he had to say had a relevance not only for his contemporaries but more significantly for future generations.

This shift from epistemology to the meaning of historical meaning (*Sinne*) enabled the question of history to transcend any actual historical consciousness in favour of the opposition between the historical and unhistorical. Indeed the relevance of this shift in perspective has not diminished as can be seen by the remarkable echoes of Nietzsche's meditation to be found in the *Historikerstreit* that recently engaged German historians, academics and public alike.[68] Nietzsche's counter-blast against the current trends of nineteenth century thinking is distinguished by a willingness to refuse orthodox solutions to the present's ills. Europe, for Nietzsche, was suffering not only under certain forms of historical consciousness, but more importantly, man was now at last beginning to reap the ruinous rewards of his capacity for memory by the overbearing historical consciousness that pervaded his life. It is this over-valorisation of historical consciousness that must be refused if history was to serve the needs of living men.

UDHL is essentially concerned with the phenomena of remembering and forgetting, which Nietzsche saw as peculiar to the human species. His guiding aim was to ascertain how the recognition of time's passage, and man's awareness of his historical nature functions both creatively and destructively in human life. For Nietzsche, the inexorableness of this past is the root of man's own self-mutilation. Man would like to exist fully in the present but the encumbrance of the past continually frustrates this desire. Human existence is an "imperfect tense" that can

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68 For a review of this debate see the New German Critique, Spring/Summer 1988, No. 44.

never become a present and death alone can satisfy the deep desire for forgetfulness that is bred by this predicament.

The problem for creative man according to Nietzsche, is to learn to forget, to "stand on a single point... without fear or giddiness" - not to deny the past but to be able to forget it when necessary for the enhancement of life. Moreover, the capacity to remember the past out of which all specifically human constructions originate, is secondary to the capacity for forgetfulness which enables a necessary sifting of the potentially overwhelming input of human experience. More importantly, it is this faculty that enables human being to have done with past experience and be open to the new. For Nietzsche, memory is the glory and ruination of man and is painfully acquired through a partial overcoming of the logically prior function of forgetfulness. In this sense, man carries his historicity with him regardless of his desire, but it is nonetheless for all that, a highly developed acquisition: "This precisely is the long story of how responsibility originated."[69] The question Nietzsche asks of his own time, is whether this capacity for memory has been overcultivated to the extent that it has become a danger to life itself. His response did not simply consist in abandoning history but of determining when man is justified in forgetting and it is this learning process that becomes the next stage in man's development towards the *Übermensch*. The historical and unhistorical are equally necessary to the health of the individual, community and system of culture and there is no question of simply opposing one to the other. It should be noted here that the productive tension sought by Nietzsche in the conflict of these two great modalities of human being resonates throughout

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69 F. Nietzsche, The Genealogy of Morals, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1969), p. 58.

Ricoeur's characterisation of social life as a practice suspended between the embeddedness of ideology and the potentiality of utopia understood as metaphorical refiguration. It is this tension which also structures Foucault's meditations on the appropriate relationship with historical existence. and in chapters five and six I will stress the significance of this in evaluating Foucault's accomplishment.

For Nietzsche, forgetting is the force inherent in the "plastic power of a man, a people, a culture" a power that has the "capacity to develop out of oneself in one's own way, to transform and incorporate into oneself what is past and foreign, to heal wounds, to replace what has been lost, to recreate broken moulds." (UDHL,62) Forgetting thus enables a closed and whole horizon within which a living being may remain healthy, strong and productive, free from the dissipation of historicity. However, we should be alerted to the very un-Nietzschean self-gathering that echoes in this call for the closure of the imperfect tense of remembering. We shall see later on how Nietzsche cannot be simply utilized for the promotion of permanent identities.

Nietzsche is emphatically locating the problem of history and memory in the framework of the value or need which it serves. Man chooses to remember, to be historical, in specific ways and the modes of this remembering constitute various self-understandings which in turn can be assessed by their destructive or constructive contribution to life. Accordingly, the way one interprets the past determines how one will interpret the present and the future. Good history is to choose a past by constituting an image of it and thus choosing a future. It is thus apocalyptic, an implicit vision of a world of desire. Although man both forgets and remembers, in a uniquely human dialectic, in the present of

the nineteenth century it is forgetting that is important for Nietzsche because it enables a readjustment of the force of memory which had produced a unhealthy lingering over the origins and determinations of the past. This is why Nietzsche's thought can be preeminently described as untimely in that it marks an understanding of the future by the overcoming associated with the coming of the *Übermensch.*[70]

In terms of a diagnosis of his own time, Nietzsche was asking how a active forgetfulness could be opposed to the overpowering urge to remember which undercuts the will to act creatively. However, this does not imply that history is constituted by the subject, rather it is a careful circumscribing of human needs in terms of the inexhaustible metaphor of life, which Nietzsche will later designate the will to power. For life does need the service of history, it is only an excessive abuse of this that dissipates rather than increases its productive powers.

Nietzsche's famous differentiation between monumental, antiquarian and critical history is not intended to exhaustively classify the modes of access to the past. Rather it should itself be seen as a particular historical response to understanding the interests of the nineteenth century. Nietzsche granted that man uses history in three ways: for his action and struggle, for conservative and reverential needs, and as a cure for his suffering and desire for deliverance but these all in turn generate their own peculiar threats to the possibility of creativity implied in active forgetfulness.

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70 See David Wood, The Deconstruction of Time (Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press International, 1989), "Nietzsche's Transvaluation of Time".

Monumental history's use is in its exemplification of human nobility through its teaching that: "the greatness that once existed was in any event once possible and may thus be possible again." (UDHL,69) Its value lies in producing a sense of continuity and affinity between greatness of all ages which is why it is addressed to men of action and strength in search of inspiration and models that cannot be found in the present. This quite obviously lends itself to history conceived of as the story of great people accomplishing great deeds and makes use of the past in order to repudiate the mundanity of the present and accomplish a mastering that is oriented towards the forging of the future. However, this historical perspective has its disadvantages. It values the surface similarities of phenomena without inquiring into the diverse multitude of causes behind and it also tends towards the search for genius in each historical singularity. to the cost of causes but improperly seeks the possibility of universal genius in every singularity. Hence, it hides the "real historical nexus of cause and effect", erases the uniqueness of all great things, and has a tendency to romanticize the past. In this respect monumental history involves an obliteration of the difference that is historical constitution. In this dissolution of singularity, the past as an enigmatic otherness also suffers. As a stimulus to life, monumental history can be very effective, but at its limit it can betray the present and the future by intimating that the aspiration to greatness is ultimately a impossible task in the present because the value of greatness is only subsequently "conferred by history".

Antiquarian history seems to devalue the present in a more immediate way through its pious reverence for the past. However, its usefulness for the present lies in this very respect for origins which enables the preservation of the conditions that brought the present into existence.

In this sense it serves life through the reverence for established tradition. It is the "contentment of the tree in its roots, the happiness of knowing that one is not wholly accidental and arbitrary but grown out of a past as its heir, flower and fruit, and that one's existence is thus excused and, indeed, justified - it is this which is today usually designated as the real sense of history." (UDHL,71) The usual criticism of such a mode of understanding is voiced by Nietzsche. Taken to an extreme this attitude tends to level things through unselective admiration of everything past, however great or small. It values the archaic for its own sake and creates distrust in anything new. If everything that is past is equally venerable history becomes a unthinking reverence and the mummification of a past no longer animated by the present nor inspired by it.

The apparent answer to both these modes of historical existence is critical history. This originates in the desire to shatter the burden of the past in order to live in the fullness of the present. The critical historian is concerned with bringing the past "before the tribunal, scrupulously examining it and finally condemning it;" (UDHL,76). Critical history has as its arbitrator not critical reason but the strong life. Every past, from this perspective, is worthy of condemnation simply because it is no more; to live is to be unjust and unmerciful. This critical activity imitates the time of forgetfulness in the sense of giving "oneself as it were a posteriori a past in which one would like to originate in opposition to that which one did originate."(UDHL,76) The present is an active interpretation of the past which cuts through its myths of greatness and values, does away with old pieties, and repudiates its demands. This too, has its destructive side, because when it is carried too far by arguing that all that has past is "worthy of

perishing" according to the demands of life, it results in the precarious self-valorisation of the present. Critical historiography is history carried out in the conviction that everything is transient and worthy of being condemned but it is "hard to know the limit to denial of the past". This conception of history is creative when it acts in the service of present needs and undermines those of the past and the future but its merciless tribunal is always in danger of consuming this present too. A vision of history that destroys without any desire to construct, will ultimately destroy illusions in everything and will be punished by the ultimate tyrant, Nature.

Each type of historical consciousness bears the possibility of extremism within itself: presentism, archaicism and futurism respectively. A careful balancing of the various modes of historical consciousness, it would seem, might be the most judicious way to proceed but this too has its problems, not least in its attempt to create a better history rather than question the effects of the desires of memorative existence:

> When the historical sense reigns *without restraint*, and all its consequences are realized, it uproots the future because it destroys illusions and robs the things that exist of the atmosphere in which alone they can live.(UDHL,95)

Nietzsche's proposed remedies for all these forms of historical consciousness in their extreme, or destructive, aspects are the "superhistorical" and "unhistorical" points of view.

It is only by fully taking account of its essential aesthetic and poetic qualities that Nietzsche argues one can turn the historical sense to the service of life. The attempt to turn it into a science always detracts from this life-enhancing potential: "knowledge of the past has at all

times been desired only in the service of the future and the present and not for the weakening of the present or for depriving a vigorous future of its roots." (UDHL,77) In opposition to the vaunted attempt at scientific objectivity prevalent in nineteenth century historiography, Nietzsche proposes that real historical objectivity is to comprehend the past and instil it with the "interestedness" of the artist:

> To think of history objectively in this fashion is the silent work of the dramatist; that is to say, to think of all things in relation to all others and to weave the isolated event into the whole: always with the presupposition that if a unity of plan does not already reside in things it must be implanted into them.(UDHL,91)

This implies that historical wisdom, as distinct from historical knowledge or information, is creative insight and invention. The possibility of making 'true' statements about the past is here subordinated to the articulation of 'right' or 'important' aspects of the past. The value of the historian's work does not lie in its general propositions, but rather in "composing inspired variations on" history, "enhancing it, elevating it to a comprehensive symbol... and thus "disclosing a whole world of profundity, power, and beauty." (UDHL,93)

As an artist the historian must master the historical field in a way that enables a certain mastering of the present and justifies the command that one should interpretively master the past only by what is most powerful in the present. Nietzsche argues that the past "speaks as an oracle: only if you are an architect of the future and know the present will you understand it." (UDHL,94). Only with the destruction of the emasculating historical consciousness that aspires to observe history without any effect upon one's subjectivity can one begin to create a new resolute vision of life.

It is from the strength of the present that proceeds the strength to master one's past. Ricoeur argues that the untimeliness of Nietzsche's meditation arises from its enduring significance in reactualizing the status of the present in regard to history. (TN,3,239) On the one hand, the present is always the end point of a completed history and on the other, the present has the possibility of becoming the initiating force of a history that is yet to be made. It is here that the prohibition against deifying the past or the future at the expense of the present receives its full force. There is no one authentic way of writing life-enhancing historiography, this is to be a matter for those artists of the future with their own understanding of the needs of their time (Foucault would presumably endorse this attitude wholeheartedly). In his "awesome" (the adjective is Ricoeur's) advocation of the "artistic drive" which spins a web over the past and in which "objectivity and justice have nothing to do with one another" (UDHL,91) can be found the secret complicities of Foucault's history of the present and the plea for the irremediably narrative constitution of historiography.

(v) The Forging of Identities: History as Value Formation

The *Historikerstreit* or "Historian's controversy" that erupted in 1986 in the German Federal Republic was a particularly explicit examination of the problematic relationship between historical consciousness and contemporary self-understanding. In the conflict over historiographical method, over generational perceptions, the political uses of history and the limits of the historicization of the emotionally charged subject of National Socialism, there was nothing less than the question of the use

of history for life in the broadest sense at issue. Nietzsche would no doubt have been able to recognize all the moves made in this debate. His own thinking about the perils of historical consciousness does not simply place him on the side of those historians who call for a changed relation to the National Socialist past, however. This thinking can be summed up in the words of Franz Josef Strauss who argued that:

> We must end the attempt to limit German history to the twelve years of Hitler - the representation of German history as an endless path of Germans' mistakes and crimes, criminalizing the Germans. (...) We must emerge from the dismal Third Reich and become a normal nation again.[71]

The desire to be able to forget the twelve year history of the Third Reich in order to project a positive identity for Germany in the present; one that would be able to take a larger lead in European and world matters free from the burden of the past, does at first seem close to Nietzsche's plea for the "unhistorical sense" in order to fashion a horizon around oneself that is advantageous to life in the present. Certainly there are very strong echoes of Nietzsche's statements from UDHL in the pronouncements of historian's advocating a change in the post-war consensus thinking about the Third Reich and its relationship to the present. We cannot, however, take this to be an indication of equivalent attitudes about history. For the conservative historians, historical consciousness is not placed into question, rather it is a particular form of such consciousness that uproots notions of continuous identity through an emphasis upon the specific construction sites of such identity that is to be challenged. That Nietzsche's aestheticization of history cannot be easily appropriated for the task of promoting a

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[71] Franz Josef Strauss, The New York Times, 13 January 1987. Cited in Hans-Georg Betz, "Deutschlandpolitik on the Margins: On the Evolution of Contemporary New Right Nationalism in the Federal Republic", New German Critique, No. 44. p. 149.

strong German national identity one only has to remember what it means for him to call himself a "good European".[72]

Three main historians can be identified on the revisionist side of the debate: Michael Stürmer, Andreas Hillgruber, and Ernst Nolte. Stürmer, who is a speechwriter and adviser to Helmut Kohl, sees Germany as a country without a history, where a loss of orientation and a search for identity are integrally related. He argues that: "In a country without history, he who fills the memory, defines the concepts and interprets the past, wins the future."[73] Another conservative historian, Hagen Schulze has argued that:

> The flight from history has come to an end. The attempt of post-war West German society simply to cast off the burden of the past in order to live with the future has failed. A nation can confuse itself with a society aiming at the highest possible gross national product for only so long.... The more uncertain the present, the darker the future, the greater the need for historical orientation.... For individuals just as for peoples, there can be no future without history; and what is not worked through in the memory will reemerge as neurosis or hysteria.[74]

This attitude, which sees the controlling of history as vital to present understanding and to the shaping of the future, is one shared by all those involved in the controversy. It is precisely the fact that their views upon the nature of Germany's past are not just academic curiosities but effect the public realm and contribute to the formation of a specific identity, that prompted Habermas to engage in the controversy, not so much as a professional historian but as a citizen

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72 See F. Nietzsche, The Twilight of the Idols, tr. R. J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968).
73 Cited in J. Habermas, "A Kind of Settlement of Damages (Apologetic Tendencies)", New German Critique, No. 44 p. 28.
74 Cited in Mary Nolan, "The Historikerstreit and Social History", New German Critique, No. 44, p. 62.

who is affected by the historical self-understandings of his society.[75] Habermas insists on the unavoidable plurality of historiographical interpretations in a plural society, but is concerned to emphasize the equally unavoidable political implications of any interpretation and the danger of history that claims to be above political ideology by a claim to scientific status. Of concern for Habermas is the particular future people like Stürmer have in mind for Germany. Such a future depends for them upon the crucial issue that the Federal Republic had developed into "the centre-piece of the European defensive arc in the Atlantic system" in the post-war period.[76] Hillgruber argues that the historian:

> must identify with the concrete fate of the German population in the east and with the desperate and costly struggle of the German Eastern Army and of the German navy in the Baltic area, who sought to protect the East German population from the Red Army's orgy of revenge, from mass rape, arbitrary murder and indiscriminate deportation... and to keep escape routes to the west open.[77]

Such a claim must be seen in terms of a contribution to the contemporary ideological struggle for the past. The conservative political aim was to maintain the Federal Republic's pro-N.A.T.O. and anti-communist tendencies in a period of shifting political constellations, not least of which was a Soviet Union that increasingly sought rapprochement in European and world affairs. Hillgruber is arguing for an understanding of the anti-Bolshevik impulse that nourished German fascism as a legitimate disposition and one that from the perspective of the Right has since proved to be a central factor in the fall of the Soviet empire.

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75 "A Kind of Settlement of Damages (Apologetic Tendencies)" p. 29.
76 See David Morley and Kevin Robins, "No Place Like *Heimat*: Images of Homeland in European Culture" in New Formations, 12, Winter 1990.
77 Andreas Hillgruber, Two Kinds of Collapse: The Destruction of the German Reich and the End of European Jewry, cited in John Torpey, 'Habermas and the Historians', New German Critique, No. 44, 1988, p.8.

Ernst Nolte in his essay "Between Myth and Revisionism"[78] presents another form of conservative interpretation of the Nazi past. This is one that emphasizes the similarities between Nazi crimes against humanity and other cases of politically motivated mass extermination. Auschwitz is set off against the holocaust of Dresden but more importantly it is compared to other programs of mass annihilation notably the elimination of the kulaks under Stalin:

> Auschwitz... was above all a reaction born out of the anxiety of the annihilating occurrences of the Russian Revolution.... (T)he so called annihilation of the Jews during the Third Reich was a reaction or a distorted copy and not a first act or an original.[79]

There are structural and functional parallels drawn between Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia but Russia it is implied is the model and cause for the worst aspects of Nazi Germany. The historical relativisation of the Nazi period, the playing down of its uniqueness in the twentieth century, goes hand in hand with a reinterpretation of German nationalism placed in the context of a thousand year history. Seen in this light the twelve year period of National Socialism is something that no longer carries the same importance for the present. Instead, the Third Reich is subsumed in the grand narrative sweep of German history, a vast panorama of cultural development and varying political regimes. Two strategies are revealed in this move. First, there is a levelling out of the uniqueness of the Nazi regime and second, there is much apportioning of blame for the period upon Hitler himself in order

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78 Ernst Nolte, "Between Myth and Revisionism", in Aspects of the Third Reich, ed., H. Koch (London: Macmillan, 1985), p. 24.
79 Ibid. p. 36.

to relegitimize the drive towards German national identity and a strong middle Europe.

Ultimately the question of identity is focused upon the extent to which Auschwitz and the excesses of the Third Reich are still part of German identity today? Corresponding to the understandable Jewish desire to remember the past, especially in relation to increasing denials of the Holocaust,[80] is the equally understandable German desire to forget; to release the present from the burden of guilt that such a past creates. The uniqueness of the Nazi era is played down by a stress upon the normality and continuity of the Third Reich with other German regimes both past and present. This is not Nietzsche's strategy of active forgetfulness as such. Rather it is the historical relativization that he precisely condemned as "weakness". It is also remarkable that such historiography that stressed the everyday continuities and normalities of much of National Socialism was until recently the domain of the Left. It was, for example, the principle motivation behind Marxist studies of the Third Reich to insist upon it as the perfectly logical outcome of capitalism. The historical relativization of such a seemingly unique period of history had, from the perspective of the Left, took two main forms. The first is a form of structural history that analyzes high politics in the light of long term structural developments, this especially concentrated on the pre-Nazi and pre-capitalist roots of fascism. The second was everyday history (*Altagsgeschicte*) which dedicates itself to uncovering subjective experience and reconstructing everyday life in

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80 See Gill Seidel, The Holocaust Denial, (Leeds: Beyond the Pale Collective, 1986)

order to recapture the normality of many aspects of a world whose extreme abnormality was already extensively researched.[81]

The *Historikerstreit* has to be seen as part of a larger controversy about the political uses of history and the relationship between historical consciousness and identity. Here the question in terms of historical continuity is 'What sort of identity is possible and desirable for Germans after fascism?' Historians of the Right have utilised this call for the historicization or normalization of National Socialism and adopted the themes of continuity and normality with a different intent to those on the Left, however. The Right seeks to integrate the history of the Third Reich into German history and identity, to domesticate it, by stressing how much life went on as before and has done since the regime's existence. This historicization of the period is thus two-edged. On the one hand there is a desire to level out the uniqueness of the regime in order to lessen its importance to the present and on the other, there is a desire to emancipate all epistemological and methodological strategies from the controversial nature of the subject in order for the historian to be able to deal with it in a manner no different from any other phenomena. This latter perspective has the laudable intention of taking into account cross-cultural comparisons and placing National Socialism in the larger context of German history in order to reveal comparable developments elsewhere. Both strategies involve a privileging of historical continuity in which the question of present self-understanding is posed through the issue of identity that a poststructuralist understanding of history would dispute. It is not just that historians of the Right have been able to take over the strategies

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81 See Mary Nolan, "The Historikerstreit and Social History", New German Critique, No. 44.

of social history and used them for their own ideological ends, but that such strategies are always already profoundly implicated in the projecting of the value of presence. History as the recuperation of the past in terms of the present exemplifies the structure of presence which Derrida, for example, has been particularly concerned to deconstruct.[82] On this understanding it simply will not do to argue that the correct interpretation of the present will enable a correct interpretation of the past. The possibility of presenting such a correct interpretation is inextricably fastened to one's understanding of both the past and the future in an interminable slippage that dissolves the possibility of ever attaining presence. Historical objectivity is just this desire for presence.

What is interesting about the strategy of conservative historians such as Stürmer, is that they put forward a version of history that seeks not only to promote an identity for the society they live in but see history as the primary method of providing a higher provision of meaning in modern society. This type of historiography is politically conscious of its responsibility to create and spread a historical world-view which will promote a strong national identity at a point in history when this has become deeply problematic. Historiography is thus taken to be principally rooted in the what Nietzsche defined as historical meaning (*historischen Sinne*). Contemporary Germany, at the time of the *Historikersteit*, was undergoing a crisis of identity which the events of reunification have only served to deepen. The possibilities for winning the future through defining the past has never been greater than in such times. This is why Neo-nationalism has become an important theme

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82 The exemplary presentation of this is still to be found in Derrida's analysis of Husserlian phenomenology in Speech and Phenomena, and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs, tr. by D. B. Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973).

in German politics on both the Left and the Right.[83] At the time of the *Historikerstreit* there was a significant minority of thinkers who claimed that dissolving the hostile blocs in Europe and reunifying Germany was the only way to avert a nuclear war and at the same time this went hand in hand with anti-Americanism and anti-communism and tended towards casting Germany in the role of a victim of a great power conspiracy to deprive it of its legitimate place in the world. The situation was easily characterized as one of division and foreign domination linked to a past that is typified by guilt and defeat and a future that is hopeless. Given this situation the call to de-criminalize the history of Germany as the pre-condition for a normal national consciousness seems fairly innocuous and necessary to many.

The interesting thing from the point of view of our thesis, is that this 'crisis of identity' is not really a specifically historical event defined in terms of great world events but a intrinsic structure of historical meaning. Why can a crisis of identity arise? Nothing less than an understanding of identity in terms of the structure of repetition which is an always already absence will enable an appreciation of the possibility of such a crisis in every present. The attitude that sees an "analysis of the present as being precisely, in history, a present of rupture, or of high point, or of completion or of a returning dawn, etc." is as Foucault points out a highly dangerous disposition. In contrast to this the modesty of an analysis of the present that eschews such solemnity and irruptive metaphors is the modesty that refuses to understand the present as presence, "where everything is completed and

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83 See Hans-Georg Betz, "Deutschlandpolitik on the Margins: On the Evolution of the Contemporary New Right Nationalism in the Federal Republic", New German Critique, No. 44.)

begun again."[84] In the context of coming to terms with the perceived rupture of 1933-45, one can readily compare, for example, Heidegger's devaluing of the meaning of the second world war to see how philosophy can readily site itself on the abyss of great decisions.[85]

What is clear from the *Historikerstreit* is that the nature of historical understanding is always a question of a contemporary understanding. Those who want to forget or at least play down the past, do so with the intention of emphasizing the importance of the present and of being able to define this present through the revision of historical understanding. The practice of a certain type of history, of a certain type of remembrance leads on this perspective to a life that "becomes stunted and degenerate" (UDHL,59) by the burden of guilt. Nietzsche's notion that we can suffer from the cultivation of history is one that would readily be acceded to by the Right; for them his comment that a "hypertrophied virtue - such as the historical sense... can ruin a nation just as effectively as a hypertrophied vice" (UDHL,60), carries with it a resonant warning about the future of the German nation. Of course, professional historians do not want to do away with history as such. Instead history is used as value orienting force that places emphasis upon a healthy German identity. Such identity implies historical continuity which is problematized by the notion that the present is marked by catastrophe. The idea of a *Stunde Null*, of German history beginning all over again in 1945 is plainly out of the question if one wants to reactivate ideas of a strong unified land of the middle, lodged between the Soviet Union and the West. Hence, the harking back to the roots of German nationalism relegitimized by a dismissal of National

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84 PPC, 36.
85 M. Heidegger, What is Called Thinking?, tr. J. Glenn Gray and F. Wieck (New York, London: Harper and Row, 1972), pp. 66-7.

Socialism as a mistake forced upon the German people by the Austrian Hitler.

Nietzsche's view about how to interpret the past takes on a uncanny prescience in this light. Certainly the neo-nationalists would endorse his statement that:

> If you are to venture to interpret the past you can do so only out of the fullest vigour of the present: only when you put forth your noblest qualities in all their strength will you divine what is worth knowing and preserving in the past. (UDHL,94)

Quite obviously what is worth knowing and preserving about Germany's past for them, is the seemingly ordinary Western democratic idea of national determination and the repressed aspiration for a strong world influencing Germany. In this scheme of things, the crimes against humanity committed in the name of the German people are not something worth preserving in any positive sense.

> When the historical sense reigns without restraint, and all its consequences are realized, it uproots the future because it destroys illusions and robs the things that exist of the atmosphere in which alone they can live. (UDHL,95)

In the second essay of The Genealogy of Morals, Nietzsche depicts memory as one of man's faculty's developed through the long and painful process of civilization. This faculty enables not only a commitment to a fixed past but to a particular future as well.[86] This dangerous capacity is, according to Nietzsche, precisely what is meant by conscience. Memory enables one to bind oneself to the commitments of the past which in turns acquires a determining influence upon both the

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86 F. Nietzsche, The Genealogy of Morals, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1969), p. 58.

present and future. This capacity brings about an ordering and structuring of existence which if allowed to flourish without check can have devastating effects upon man's powers of life. For Nietzsche, this capacity becomes bad conscience when one is unable to accept one's past and good conscience is precisely the opposite, the ability to accept all of one's past acts and to be released from the debilitating effect of the past understood as that which is unchangeable, is precisely what is meant by conscience. The capacity to remember gives to an oath taken in the past the power to bear upon and to determine the present and the future. The oath taken, remembered, and adhered to imposes a kind of order on human life, but one quite different from that imposed by the prior capability of forgetting. When the oblivion of forgetting is replaced by remembrance the will becomes bound to a prior condition and desire; and more importantly, it continues to affirm that condition and desire, even at the expense of its own health. For Nietzsche, however, bad conscience is the inability to accept one's past acts as one's own whilst good conscience is the ability to say that whatever happened or will happen is by one's own agency and a manifestation of one's qualities. To be oneself is to deny the obligations which both past and future lay upon one except for those obligations that one chooses for oneself and honours simply because one finds them good.

In chapter twelve of the second essay of The Genealogy of Morals, Nietzsche sets forth the ontological basis of true historical sense that Foucault took fully to heart in "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History":

> there is for historiography of any kind no more important proposition than the one it took such effort to establish but which really ought to be established now: the cause of the origin of a thing and its eventual utility, its actual employment and place in a system of purposes, lie worlds apart; whatever exists, having somehow come into being, is

> again and again reinterpreted to new ends, taken over, transformed and redirected by some power superior to it; all events in the organic world are a subduing, a becoming master, and all subduing and becoming master involves a fresh interpretation, an adaptation through which previous 'meaning' and 'purpose' are necessarily obscured or even obliterated. (UDHL,77)

The historical process is seen to be not a process at all but a series of moments, each of which is related to what came before it and what will follow it by the intentions of the agents on the scene at that time. Behind this notion of history is the attempt to do away with not only all teleology but all causality as well.

Nietzsche's recognition of the burden of memory does not just apply to the burden of past deeds that one would rather forget. More important for him, was the very way he thought memory had actually developed in man. The emergence of memory and its inculcation is the result of pain and punishment and this method of acquisition applies equally to social memory:

> Man could never do without blood, torture, and sacrifices when he felt the need to create a memory for himself; the most dreadful sacrifices and pledges (sacrifices of the first-born among them), the most repulsive mutilations (castration, for example), the cruellest rites of all the religious cults (and all religions are at the deepest level systems of cruelties) - all this has its origin in the instinct that realized that pain is the most powerful aid to mnemonics.[87]

By the cruellest methods the "individual was taught to remember a few 'I will nots'... so as to participate in the advantages of society".[88] The freedom of self-determination and reason are thus constituted by human cruelty. Man's guilt conscience and his sense of indebtedness to his

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87 Ibid. p. 61.
88 Ibid. p. 62.

beginnings are intertwined and are ultimately for Nietzsche, the cause of his betrayal of the present world in the hope of a world to come. This sense of generational obligation (which Nietzsche located in ancient ancestor worship) and historical consciousness amount it would seem to the same thing. The capacity to remember lies at the heart of both. Thus, the escape from generational obligation entails an escape from historical consciousness in a reversal of Ricoeur's emphasis upon the necessity of rescuing the memory of the victims and slaughtered possibilities of the past. If men are not to die of the debtor mentality that keeps them from living for themselves alone, remembering must be replaced by an active forgetfulness. In terms of the writing of history the aim can be conceived of as the dissolution of those modes reliant upon memory in order to return it to the poetic capabilities of man. That is to promote a capacity for creative forgetting, so that thought and imagination can respond immediately to the present world and shape it as current need and desire require.

Although the historians of the Right do not wish to repudiate history as a practice that generates truth, their common belief in an exclusive history, often symbolic and mythical, and seen as an indispensable guide for the continuing search for identity - racial, cultural, religious, or national, constitutes a barrier that allows only certain kinds of history to emerge. The radical Nietzschean undermining of history as a science, on the one hand seems to support their practice in its insistence upon the primacy of the present, and on the other seems to mock their naive attempts to foster historical continuity. Nietzsche himself, would have immediately questioned the move to cast a spurious unity upon the past and present. What is quite clear is that his version of history as genealogy is rather more amenable to the discontinuities and breaks in

historical consciousness than history as meaning-giving activity is. The crucial point for Nietzsche is that the "fullest exertion of the vigour of the present" does not shy away from mastering its past. The capacity to forget does not entail repression, for this is no solution, the ghosts of the past will always come back to haunt future generations. Rather, Nietzsche, explicitly says that the greatest strength is required for any interpretation of the past and in a sense, this is more so when that past is something as catastrophic as National Socialism. "Like to like! Otherwise you will draw the past down to you". (UDHL,91) It would seem that unless one is willing to confront one's past, no matter how traumatic, then the danger of repetition is always present. Interpreting the present rise of nationalism in Germany as such a case would not be especially off the mark.

According to Foucault, Nietzsche did not accept any of the three main modes of historical understanding he had distinguished but instead twisted each of them into completely different forms. These altered forms "imply a use of history that severs its connection to memory, its metaphysical and anthropological model, and constructs a counter-memory - a transformation of history into a totally different form of time." (NGH,93) We have already seen that this new form of time is not so totally different, and indeed that it retains important vestiges of recovery in its relation to the articulation of the suppressed struggles and defeats of history. The notion that Foucault is in some sense beyond both a critique of society and the practice of freedom is thus not to be taken at face value. Whether his challenge to the universalistic tendencies of such theories is as extensive as some commentators claim will be the subject of the next chapters.

When Nietzsche speaks of truly understanding the past "only if you are an architect of the future and know the present", he is not calling for a blind presentism. Rather he is pointing to how difficult it is to practise historical justice. Nietzsche does not simply repudiate the historical and I think it is legitimate to associate this notion of the unhistorical, of active forgetfulness, with the power of imagination and metaphor that Ricoeur has insisted upon in the refiguration of the world by historiography. Such a practice from Foucault's point of view, is one that does not shirk to do justice to oppositional elements in history, to forgotten perspectives and different histories. What is the impetus behind this? I would suggest that genealogy works on the simple level of a struggle against the history of the victors and that this is itself connected to a concern with historical justice that enables the fragile preservation of a distance between fiction and history. Fragile because the status of the oppressed and vanquished of history is a matter for struggle and conflict in the present and one that inevitably involves the notion of risk. I think that Ricoeur is absolutely right in stressing that we cannot "eliminate from a social ethics the element of risk." (IU,312) Nietzsche would have recognised that no single interpretation of history can promote a healthy attitude to the present. The cultivation of many perspectives is in this sense vital to life lived in the present. To take the example of the cultural identity of a nation-state, it is the acceptance of different and perhaps incommensurable traditions constituted by gender, ethnicity, sexuality, race and class that is the more difficult path to take. By bringing them into history and into recognition and representation there can be an appreciation of the complexity that crisscrosses the patterns of the present and that can never be turned into the site of a presence because there will always be a marginalization of some elements in this articulation. To recognize that

something such as the nation as a cultural, linguistic, racial or whatever unit is not a closed history, not something already achieved, but an open malleable framework in the making, is to be an architect of the future without the simplistic option of self-confident national identity and historical continuity. The paradox is that historians of the Right, such as those engaged in the *Historikerstreit*, at one and the same time profess that history is something that has already happened, that is back there, and yet in their everyday professional activity treat this same history as something to be bitterly fought over in the present. This should immediately alert anyone to the dangers of consigning the past to that which is over and done with.

Chapter 4

The Normative Critique of Dispersive History

(i) The Delimitation of Social Critique

As we have seen in chapter three, in any study of Foucault one has to take into account the irredeemably Nietzschean basis of his project. Quite clearly the attempt to "make differences" bears the structure of the endlessness of interpretation even as it does away with concepts such as intention, consciousness, author and trace in order to give a pure description of the facts of discourse. After AK Foucault explicitly turns to Nietzsche to articulate his position. The essay "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History", is the *locus classicus* of Foucault's Nietzscheanism. Here meaning is coupled with force to give a notion of interpretation as "the violent or surreptitious appropriation of a system of rules, which in itself has no essential meaning" and the "development of humanity" is taken to be this "series of interpretations". The hermeneutic process is even more twisted away from its traditional linguistical scheme in which the possibility of dialogue or "fusion of horizons" is present in the very nature of the process of interpretation. This position therefore defines itself against a philosophical hermeneutics that universalizes understanding to a ontological characteristic of human being and against a critical theory that proposes a normative foundation through the very structure of communicative competence.[1]

In this chapter I wish to explore some of the leading implications of Foucault's work from the traditional perspective of social freedom understood as a critical theory of society. Although I agree that the

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[1] Cf. H. G. Gadamer, Truth and Method (London: Sheed and Ward, 1975), and J. Habermas, The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures, tr. F. Lawrence (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1987), Lecture XI.

normative questions raised by critical theorists are important in understanding the potential of Foucault's own work on the level of emancipatory discourse, I do not think that this emphasis can justify the wholesale reevaluation of Foucault as a flawed thinker. Instead, as will be seen in the following chapter, I argue that it is precisely this apparent incoherence in Foucault's intentions that is a genuine response to the difficulty of practising social critique. That this issues in a seemingly insular and private practise of ethics and politics, is I wish to argue, a misunderstanding of the reevaluations of such fields that Foucault seeks. In this sense the appearance of contradictions in the practise of living well would not be considered a failure, but rather an indication that the correct and difficult exercise of freedom was flourishing.

In his most radical Nietzschean guise it would seem that one would have to characterize Foucault's position as diametrically opposed to philosophies that seek to mitigate the pluralistic nature of interpretation or to propose a standard by which to criticize the nature of society. Interpretations of Foucault invariably thematize the nature of this difference by a comparison with other critical theories. Either he is taken to be a critical thinker who deepens our understanding of the processes of emancipation and progress (ultimately to the extent of questioning the notion of such processes altogether), or he is taken to be a misguided or flawed critical thinker who fails to ground his critique for a variety of reasons.

At first it might seem presumptuous to engage Foucault's work along the lines of its potentiality as a critical theory of society and to judge it from this perspective. This is because Foucault himself hardly ever

engages in the traditional debates about the proper methodology, epistemology, and ontology of a critical theory of society. Moreover his work can be considered as a problematization of the category 'the social' and a reconsideration of the human sciences in terms of their own historical emergence.[2] Nevertheless this presumption is vindicated if only by the fact that Foucault's work has been seen as a challenge to the possibility of a critique of society by many who work within the human sciences.[3] The fundamental framework of this thesis being the self-understanding of the present as a loss of singular universal history enables this particular debate about critical theory to be placed within a further narrative which in a sociological construction might be phrased as the endless coming crisis of sociology. That Foucault at times regarded this challenge as an important part of his work further justifies this method of interpretation. Despite this rather indirect reason for evaluating Foucault's work along such lines there is the more direct one based upon the fact that he did at times reflect upon the nature of what he was doing and place himself within the traditions of critique springing from the Enlightenment. Thus, the attempt to claim Foucault as a critical thinker can at least start from, for example, Foucault's positioning of his work within the tradition of Kant to be found in the text "What is Enlightenment?".

John Rajchman in MFFP has presented one of the most sustained attempts to present Foucault's thought as centred around critique orientated towards freedom. He presents Foucault's thought as a new form of critical thinking (albeit situated in the tradition of scepticism),

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2 See J. Minson Genealogies of Morals, p. 9.
3 Cf. A. Giddens, "From Marx to Nietzsche? Neo-Conservatism, Foucault and Problems in Contemporary Political Theory", in Profiles and Critiques in Social Theory (London: Macmillan, 1982).

one that is best defined through its rejection of traditional Marxian and Freudian models of emancipatory thinking. Another study of Foucault by Dreyfus and Rabinow characterizes his work as a critical reflection upon and rejection of the three principal modern attempts to study human beings - phenomenology, structuralism, and hermeneutics.[4] This study too, takes Foucault to have been centrally concerned with diagnosing the current situation of our society and providing critical insight into its discontents. In comparison with these two examples, other thinkers have interpreted Foucault's work unfavourably precisely because it fails to provide for them a coherent critical theory of society. This critical reception of Foucault not surprisingly is greatest amongst those working within the tradition of critical theory stemming from Kant, Hegel and Marx. So for example, Peter Dews argues that Foucault's Nietzschean conception of power and knowledge inevitably undermines the basis for political critique because the relativism that it implies prevents the contestation of other perspectives except on the basis of some pre-discursive experience outside of all perspectives.[5] Jurgen Habermas in PDM similarly treats Foucault from the perspective of an attempt to "enlighten the Enlightenment" about the narrow sovereignty of reason. Habermas positions Foucault in the counter-discourse of modernity and hence as a critical thinker who rejects the resources of reason and its claim to be able to achieve emancipation and reconciliation within the world. Habermas agrees with Foucault that there are flaws in the Enlightenment paradigm mainly stemming from its paradigm of consciousness. Unlike Foucault, however, he believes that these defects can be made good by further enlightenment, something which he believes Foucault's totalised critique of reason does not allow.

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[4] BSH.

[5] P. Dews, The Logics of Disintegration: Post-structuralist Thought and the Claims of Critical Theory, (London: Verso, 1987)

All these interpretations of Foucault agree upon construing him as engaged in a form of critique of our current situation despite his attempt to distance himself from the various models of a critique of society and to point out their flaws. The favourable interpretations of Foucault see him as transforming critique into something quite different from traditional models; the unfavourable interpretations see him as implicitly engaged in critique along similar lines to the traditional models and failing to draw the necessary implications of such a position for a reflective understanding of his own work. Thus, we have Rajchman arguing that Foucault attempts to purge from his critical analysis anthropologism and historicism which he finds in thinkers such as Marx and Freud and which leads to a critique based on "a kind of norm or law - a final truth, a final emancipation." (MFFP,93) On the other hand, we have Habermas arguing that Foucault's critique rests on an implicit normativism that is not theoretically accounted for and which ultimately destabilises the validity of his critical strictures on present social formations.

It is possible to claim that such approaches to Foucault are misguided in their reappropriation of his work into the mainstream of critical theory of society. This would have to take seriously the extreme Nietzschean perspectivism cited above and contend that Foucault advances no privileged validity claims for any interpretation of history, society or critique. This position although tempting in an analysis of Foucault can be taken only so far. There are three main reasons for this. First, given its opening out onto other disciplines, it seems inconceivable to argue that Foucault's work bears no similarities with other social research and critique. Second, as mentioned above, Foucault himself acknowledges at

times the nature of his work to be in some way a critique. Third, the incoherence of a position that engages other positions and yet claims no privilege in this engagement. Put simply, this last point comes down to the nature of Foucault's work, which is situated within the academic community and functions more or less along the lines of academic discourse. This position is succinctly put by Foucault himself in the course of discussing the morality of intellectual practice in contradistinction to the nature of polemics:

> In the serious play of questions and answers, in the work of reciprocal elucidation, the rights of each person are in some sense immanent in the discussion. They depend only on the dialogue situation. The person asking questions is merely exercising the right that has been given him: to remain unconvinced, to perceive a contradiction, to require more information, to emphasize different postulates, to point out faulty reasoning, etc. As for the person answering the questions, he too exercises a right that does not go beyond the discussion itself; by the logic of his own discourse he is tied to what he has said earlier, and by the acceptance of dialogue he is tied to the questioning of the other.
>
> The polemicist, on the other hand, proceeds encased in privileges that he possesses in advance and will never agree to question. On principle, he possesses rights authorizing him to wage war and making that struggle a just undertaking; the person he confronts is not a partner in the search for the truth, but an adversary, an enemy who is wrong, who is harmful and whose very existence constitutes a threat.[6]

This analysis is striking in its repudiation of a Nietzschean critique based upon force in the form of the will to power. For someone such as Dews it indicates Foucault's "belated endorsement of Habermas's attempt - an attempt which is in continuity with the tradition of Critical Theory - to accommodate the powerful arguments of the anti-foundationalists, while nevertheless avoiding the slide into relativism."[7] To what extent

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[6] Michel Foucault, "Polemics, Politics, and Problematizations" in The Foucault Reader, p. 381-2.

[7] Logics of Disintegration, p. 220.

Foucault can be so totally incorporated into this tradition is a matter for argument. What does seem clear is that it is by no means presumptuous to evaluate Foucault's work along these lines if the question of freedom is one's theme.

We have seen that Foucault's work can be defined most generally as a questioning of the various philosophies of history and methodologies of historiography that privilege continuity, teleology, totality, presence, transcendentalism, anthropologism, and historicism. This is the basis for his own genealogical histories which in his words do not "depend on 'rediscovery'" and "emphatically excludes the 'rediscovery of ourselves.'"

This dispersal of what is taken to be unified is a methodological principle that runs throughout the entirety of Foucault's work. Insofar as Rajchman, would want to argue that this is not a positive methodological principle or doctrine, he has to characterise it as "scepticism" which is a permanent questioning that proceeds case by case and has no end. Characteristic of this interpretation is its desire to be as elusive as possible about Foucault's intentions and work. A description of Foucault as an endless questioner of specific intellectual boundaries and assumptions hardly distinguishes him in the history of Western thought. That there are critical principles operating in his genealogies and that these principles are based upon ontological commitments is an important first step in bringing him into a productive relationship with the commitments of critical social science. A large part of Rajchman's interpretation follows the negative path of characterizing Foucault's thrust as a refusal to accept dogmatic unities and universal schemas wherever they might arise. To not characterize this as an

equally positive stance seems merely a matter of linguistic usage, however.

Foucault's "historical nominalism"[8] places him in a much closer relationship to a position of philosophical hermeneutics than he would want to accede to mainly because of the assumption that such positions are ultimately caught within a simplistic understanding of the subject that recuperates meaning in the process of understanding. His early characterization of hermeneutics as commentary that seeks a deeper meaning beneath that which is said is a typical polemical categorisation of the desires of this philosophical movement. Dreyfus and Rabinow argue that through a criticism of both structuralism and hermeneutics, Foucault advances a more powerful and subtle position which they call "interpretive analytics". This differs from a hermeneutics that proceeds by a reading of the background meanings shared by human beings and also, more importantly, from a hermeneutics of suspicion that aims to uncover a deeper intelligibility beneath the practices of everyday life. Such hermeneutics are part of the problem because they fail to reflect upon "what the exegetical situation is doing to both actor and the hermeneutical authority" and why:

> Since the hidden meaning is not the final truth about what is going on, finding it is not necessarily liberating; in fact, as Foucault points out, it can lead away from the kind of understanding which might help the actor resist the current practices of domination.
>
> Interpretive understanding can only be obtained by someone who shares the actor's involvement, but distances himself from it. This person must undertake the hard historical work of diagnosing and analyzing the history and organization of current cultural practices. The resulting interpretation is a pragmatically guided reading of the

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8 This notion of historical nominalism is developed by Rajchman, cf. MFFP,50-60.

> coherence of the practices of the society. It does not claim to correspond either to the everyday meanings shared by the actors or, in any simple sense, to reveal the intrinsic meaning of the practices. This is the sense in which Foucault's method is interpretive but not hermeneutic.[9]

Central to their interpretation of Foucault is the theme of the constitution of subjects and how they treat one another as objects. For them the mistake of AK is to treat language as autonomous and as constitutive of reality and they see Foucault as acknowledging this in his focus in the seventies upon the way social practices govern cognitive discourse. Thus, they argue that As a historian Foucault is trying to show how ideas of subjectivity have served as empty notions, blinding liberal theorists to the historical reality of the spread of oppressive and conformist tendencies in modern societies. This historical investigation focuses especially on how subjects are themselves constituted? Central to this research is the hypothesis that there is no pure subject prior to the forms of description and action appropriate to a person. Foucault argues that every way in which I can think of myself as a person and an agent is something that has been constituted within a web of historical events. This is the reason behind his later research into how it came to be taken for granted that subjects, desires and interdictions were taken as concepts for explaining history and society. The central interpretive problem for Foucault becomes the constitution of ourselves as subjects of desire from Christian confessional practices through to the Freudian hermeneutic of sexuality and beyond.

According to Dreyfus and Rabinow, Foucault is offering us an interpretive analytic of our current situation. The practitioner of interpretive analytics realizes that she herself is produced by what she

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[9] BSH,124.

is studying; consequently she can never stand outside it. The genealogist sees that cultural practices are more basic than any theory and that the seriousness of theory can only be understood as part of society's on-going history and self-reflection. The archaeological step back that enables a bracketing of the serious truth claims of discourse and produces the requisite distanciation from the practices of different societies, does not mean that one also has to consider these practices meaningless. Since we share cultural practices with others, and since these practices have made us what we are, we have, some common ground from which to proceed, to understand, to act. That foothold is not, however, one which is universal, or guaranteed.

Foucault thus criticizes the attempt to ground social organization by philosophical means and once this possibility is removed the attempt to legitimate normative principles is also placed into question. What makes one interpretive theory better than another on this view has yet to be worked out, but it has to do with articulating common concerns and finding a language which becomes accepted as a way of talking about social situations, while leaving open the possibility of 'dialogue', or better, a conflict of interpretations, with other shared discursive practices used to articulate different concerns.

This way of presenting Foucault's work is I think persuasive but ultimately ambiguous. One might for instance ask what is the status of social research in a strategy that attempts to articulate common concerns. Common concerns for whom? Moreover, is there not an implicit faith in progress in the reference to a working out of an interpretive theory which will become accepted? The appeal to a conflict of cultural practices within the horizon of a possibility of 'dialogue' also seems to

emaciate the radical Nietzschean thrust of Foucault's interventionist history of the present.

To argue that this position is somehow 'beyond' hermeneutics is, moreover, to falsely construe the nature of what is meant by hermeneutics in its development by philosophers such as Heidegger and even the apparently arch-conservative hermeneut, Gadamer.[10] From this perspective, hermeneutics is not something one can go beyond. Rather what is normally meant by this claim is the transcending of a particular form of hermeneutic theory, as is the case with Gadamer's rejection of hermeneutics as a distinct methodology of interpretation. For Foucault, this would be a rejection of a hermeneutical theory based upon the philosophy of consciousness. If on his own admission all of life is interpretation then transcending this would be to do away with life, to bring it to a close.

Evaluating Foucault's work from the viewpoint of a critical theory of society in this respect becomes a necessary task. Whether rival interpretations are incommensurable or commensurable is not the question. If they are commensurable then comparisons are legitimate; if they are not commensurable this does not prevent, on his pluralistic schema, the proposal of rival interpretations, including that of the need for commensurability. The argument that such a desire for commensurability understood as universalism has to be itself historicized cannot subvert the possibility of its appearance and historical claims.

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10 Cf. R. E. Palmer, "On the Transcendability of Hermeneutics", In Hermeneutics: Questions and Prospects, ed. G. Shapiro and A. Sica, (The University of Massachusetts Press, 1985).

Can Foucault be reincorporated into the tradition of a critical theory of society that aims to promote values of rational self-clarity and collective autonomy? The answer to this question might depend more upon what one's model of a critical theory is rather than upon the content of Foucault's challenges. If it is one that functions in an idealistic way in its assumptions about human freedom and reason then quite clearly Foucault's work does not fit within this tradition. Rather it is his explicit aim to criticize such a model for its idealism and for its deleterious effects. If, however, a more limited view is taken of what a critical theory of society might reasonably hope to practice, then Foucault's work can be seen as being part of this tradition - what Habermas has described as the "unfinished project of modernity".[11] The beginnings of a differentiation between the two models might consist in an unpacking of the functioning of the word "unfinished" in Habermas's narrative of modernity. Whereas the interminability of interpretation is the unsurpassable horizon for Foucault's reflections upon the present, modernity as a teleological concept is the point where Habermas's own self-understanding becomes unstable. Nevertheless, Habermas's notion that the counter-discourse of modernity seeks to enlighten the Enlightenment would still be the appropriate model for understanding Foucault in this respect. This enlightening would not consist of a shedding of light that uncovers more of the same, however, but a reorientation towards our finitude that defers the possibility of a complete understanding of society.[12]

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[11] Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity versus Postmodernity", New German Critique, 22 (1981): 3-14.

[12] See S. K. White, Postmodernism and Political Theory (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 147.

Foucault's critique of critical theory would take the form of an analysis of its underlying assumptions, its values and implicit ontology. For example, his analysis of the relationship between power and knowledge would contribute from this perspective, to a deeper understanding of the relationship between freedom and knowledge and thus to the limits of emancipation through theory. Similarly his analysis of the role of the intellectual and of the role of experts, such as psychiatrists, doctors, educators, and human scientists, contributes to a better understanding of the relationship between theory and practice and thus to a better appreciation of how knowledge can oppress as well as liberate. The crucial words here of course are 'deeper' and 'better'. Such an understanding of what Foucault is about necessarily subdues his radical challenge to critical theory and might be considered unnecessarily appropriative. Despite its desire to avoid such a recuperative model this is the inescapable danger that Rajchman's interpretation of Foucault faces. Moreover, this is not just because he explicitly places his reading within the contours of the possibility of freedom, but the necessary consequence of a philosophy of risk. That Foucault does to some extent reject the forms and aims of a critical theory of society is clearly not disputable. The extent to which this is the case, and whether it is possible to coherently repudiate the entire tradition without contaminating the purity of one's position is precisely the problem. Might it not be better, from Rajchman's point of view, simply to ignore the limits that critical theory wishes to place upon the desire to practise a concrete freedom? But then one would be seeking to circumvent some very important sites where the labour of liberty can work on its limits, that is, those very theories of universality and freedom stemming from the promises of modernity. (WE,50) This call to a work on limits it should be noted, remains itself within the orbit of the fairly traditional

privileging of difficulty in the pursuit of 'real' freedom.[13] Philosophy as strenuousness contaminates even the infinitesimal freedoms of everyday life; from now on nothing will be considered of value unless it has passed through the labour of mediation and subjected to criticism, brought to its limit and displayed as contingent and dependent. The modern age is preeminently an inversion of Rousseau's equation of Nature and freedom.

Foucault himself, never tired of warning about the dangers of an appeal to a natural body or way of life behind the already constituted experience of societal practices. This is the guiding principle behind much of his criticism of traditional critical theories that aimed to liberate from oppressive and repressive forms of life through the postulation of a fixed point beyond the practices of power. In an interview with Bernard-Henri Levy he articulates this most forcibly;

> What you call 'naturalism' signifies the idea that underneath power, with its acts of violence and its artifices, we should be able to rediscover the things themselves in their primordial vitality: behind asylum walls, the spontaneity of madness; in and through the penal system, the fertile unrest of delinquency; beneath sexual prohibitions, the purity of desire.[14]

The reference to the "spontaneity of madness" here shows how far Foucault had distanced himself from the notion that psychiatry imprisoned the pure experience of madness through a "monologue of reason". Foucault's commitment to the idea that there is no human nature, that even the body is a construct that changes throughout

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[13] For a discussion of this concept in literary theory, see George Steiner, "On Difficulty", in On Difficulty and Other Essays (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978)

[14] M. Foucault, "Power and Sex: An Interview with Michel Foucault", Telos, 32, (1977), p. 158.

history, distinguishes his work from that of a critical theory seeking to ground itself through universal normative values. Accompanying and reinforcing this negative principle is Foucault's position that any truth claim regardless of its theoretical status involves a function of power. The notion that there can be a critical theory that is normatively grounded upon the absence of such power relations is therefore short-sighted. This Foucault believes is actually borne out by the actual emergence and ensuing practice of the human sciences.

By outlining a basic schema of a critical theory of society I want to bring out exactly the main assumptions that Foucault objects to. At the same time this will enable the highlighting of certain points of contact between a simple reading of Foucault and the basic schema which might be fruitful in beginning an analysis of Foucault's claims and understanding the objections to such claims.

The unavailability of a point beyond our interpretations of the world, that can provide a principle of selection for such interpretations, marks Foucault's distance from critical theory. Critical theory that aims to be enlightening and emancipatory proceeds through the assumption that human beings are blind to their 'true' situation and have created forms of life that are alienating, frustrating and unsatisfying.[15] Liberation along this schema involves recognizing this blindness, coming to understand one's true nature and thus transforming one's life and society in order to promote happiness and satisfy true needs and

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[15] I am indebted to Brian Fay's lucid discussion of critical theory in his Critical Social Science (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987), for the following rather basic sketch of a critical theory of society. Fay himself, explicates lucidly the idealist elements involved in much of the assumptions and values of such theories and goes on to present a case for a refined version of such theory that takes into account various finitudes that limit the possibilities of rational self-understanding..

capacities. This simple schema obviously involves a variety of assumptions, some that are more primary than others but those about what human being is and might become are unsurpassable. There really is no room for pessimism here, social freedom is inseparable from enlightened thought even if that thought must undergo reflection on its "recidivist element".[16]

A central assumption underlying a critical theory of society is that critical theorizing will enable the production of solutions to the real material suffering and dissatisfaction to be found in the world. This is in turn based upon the notion that human beings are able to solve their own problems, usually through an enlightened re-ordering of collective arrangements. Critical theories attempt to rationally understand the oppressive features of society so that an understanding of this will incite its audience to transform their society. The aim of a critical theory is to be at once, true, critical and practical. The ontological assumptions about human nature and society are thus what may be termed activist and rationalist. Secular theories of human emancipation are enormously enlarged in regard to this evaluation of the power of human knowledge to reveal the basis of existence and to provide the means for creating the good life. This enlargement of human reason and activity stems from the assumption that there is nothing sacrosanct about human forms of life and that change is possible and desirable throughout all spheres of human existence. Human characteristics and social relations are not fixed but mutable and importantly improvable. Here we have the first point of contact between the assumptions of Foucault and the basic schema of critical theory.

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16 Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, Dialectic of Enlightenment, tr. by J. Cumming (London: Verso, 1979), p.xiii.

The notion that there is nothing fixed about our experience and condition is a central premise of Rajchman's interpretation of Foucault's philosophy of freedom:

> In the place of universalist narrative, he looks for the plurality and singularity of our origins; in the place of unified science or rationality, he looks for the many changing practices of knowledge; in the place of a single human experience, based in our nature or in our language, he looks for the invention of specific forms of experience which are taken up and transformed again and again. (MFFP,3)

This we might call the conventionality of human being and society. An activist conception of human beings sees them as self-interpreting beings who partially create themselves on the basis of their own self-interpretations and the societies of such beings are thus deeply conventional.[17] This notion is of course one-sided in its assumption that it is possible to change any element of human being or society at will. This, however, is not what critical theory itself maintains. There are various impediments to the process of change ranging from the sheer inertia or conservatism of human beings, the transcendence of language and culture in the broadest sense over social actors, and the dominance of certain practices through force. Obviously these conditions require much unpacking and so already one can see that the ideal schema of a critical theory is far too simple for an understanding of its aims and methods. Now Foucault himself, would argue that behind the actual complex practice of critical theory there still lies the basic assumption that human beings can produce the conditions of their existence in accordance with their desires and needs. He would question the basis of

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[17] Cf. Charles Taylor, "Interpretation and the Sciences of Man" in Philosophical Papers: 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

this assumption in two ways. First, it is ultimately based upon the notion of a transcendental self-reflective consciousness that has been undermined by thinkers as diverse as Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche. Second, even if this structure of subjectivity were the case, critical theory fails to recognise the vicious spiral of the domination of external and internal nature that it leads to. It is the aim of Discipline and Punish and The History of Sexuality respectively to articulate this.

What worries critical social theorists about the implications of Foucault's own position is that it seems to de-centre the subject so much that the possibility for resistance to power or the very coherence of such resistance becomes invalid. Thus, Anthony Giddens argues that although the lessons learned from, for example the three thinkers mentioned above, have to be taken to heart, this only means that we have to accept that subjectivity can no longer be taken as a given. Giddens argues that he does not:

> accept the idea of a 'subject-less history', if that term is taken to mean that human social affairs are determined by forces of which those involved are wholly unaware.[18]

History without "knowledgeable human subjects" would for Giddens render pointless any attempt to understand society in order to change it. Foucault's reformulation of the problem of agency and determinism in terms of power which is the means by which all things happen is just too reductive. For him, Marx's phrase "men make their own history, but not in conditions of their own choosing" expresses the guiding notion

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[18] A. Giddens, "From Marx to Nietzsche? Neo-Conservatism, Foucault and Problems in Contemporary Political Theory", in Profiles and Critiques in Social Theory (London: Macmillan, 1982), p. 221-2.

behind any critical theory that reflects upon its own emergence and normative foundations.

Two questions might be asked of this reception of Foucault. First, does he propound such a general, metaphysical theory of power that does away with the individual human being altogether? Second, in what sense can Foucault be characterised as not contributing to the elaboration of the complex questions of oppression and liberation? To the first question one would have to initially argue that Foucault does not intend to propose such a universal theory. Certainly if we are to accept Rajchman's interpretation of his intellectual practice it would be a gross mistake to try to understand Foucault in this way. A case can be made for arguing that Foucault's analytic of power is designed precisely to avoid such totalising and metaphysical aims.[19] As to the second question, it is rather too hasty to characterise Foucault as uninterested in the problem of oppression and resistance. Foucault's scepticism about the ability of individual agency to bring about resistance as a result of specific acts of will is hardly radical. Critical theory in most of its forms proposes just such a scepticism stemming from the Marxist proclivity to privilege collective class action and solidarity. From this perspective, to argue that Foucault removes the possibility of resistance, is short-sighted. On the contrary, his arguments that politics based upon the individual subject as sovereign neglects the disciplinary forms and technologies through which power increasingly operates in modern society, are meant to be just such a contribution to what Giddens calls the defending and expanding of the concepts of oppression and

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[19] See J. Minson, Genealogies of Morals, pp. 44-5, and "Strategies for Socialists: Foucault's Conception of Power", and also G. Wickham, "Power and Power Analysis: Beyond Foucault?" in Towards a Critique of Foucault ed. by Mike Gane (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986).

liberation "in the face, not of power as such, but the massive co-ordination of power and exploitation in the contemporary world system."[20]

Already Foucault has to some extent been reincorporated into the guiding assumption of critical theory: the understanding of social being as a conventional entity. This is through the simple recognition that Foucault argues that rational control over our own history is not as great as the Enlightenment proclaimed but is still possible in a reduced manner. Such optimism in the capabilities of human kind has precisely been the cause of much of the spread of oppressive structures and dissatisfaction through unfulfilled promise.[21]

This interpretation of Foucault still inserts him in the structure of oppression/liberation that critical theory assumes, and as we have seen Rajchman's is a prime instance of this. Foucault's freedom, for him, is the more *realistic* practice of the "dissolution of nature-like categories through a tracing of their historical constitution". (One might ask just how different this is from the aims of a self-reflective critical theory of society). Crucially Rajchman's distinction between the two competing models comes down to the notion that for Foucault history has no end and that this is the prerequisite of freedom as an endless practice rather than a goal to achieve. This is a rather simple distinction to make, however, relying as it does on the connection between desires and

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20 Ibid. p. 228.

21 Reinhart Kosselleck has charted this immediate increasing gap between the experience of the acceleration of change and the expectations of progress that this brought about with the emergence of the concept of *Neuzeit* in the eighteenth century, in "'*Neuzeit*': Remarks on the Semantics of the Modern Concepts of Movement" and "'Space of Experience' and 'Horizon of Expectation': Two Historical Categories" both in Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time, tr. by K. Tribe (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1985)

their ends and the closure implicit in any such process. One might ask just what the desire to be free from such a means-end model is if not a state (to be reached, achieved, accomplished, realised). Insisting that scepticism is permanently nomadic does not imply that it is inimical to an 'end' of history. Indeed, is it not to characterize history as the form of the content of freedom? Whether Rajchman's interpretation does justice to how far Foucault wishes to distance himself from the structure of oppression and liberation is therefore an important element in comparing him with traditional critical theory.

Once we have decided to incorporate Foucault's oeuvre into a productive relationship with critical theories of society, the strengths and weaknesses of each can be analysed fairly easily. The differences between the two apparently rival interpretations can be underplayed in order to emphasize their similar normative grounding and values. For an initial understanding of this similarity it might be convenient to show how far a critical theorist such as Habermas endorses sentiments that are usually taken to be Foucauldian when comparisons between the two are advanced. For instance in an interview with Perry Anderson and Peter Dews he says:

> Philosophers are not teachers of the nation. They can sometimes - if only rarely - be useful people... the common business of political discourses among citizens nevertheless stays what it is. It is not a philosophical enterprise. It is the attempt of participants to answer the question 'what now?' - in these circumstances, for us particular people, what are or would be the best institutions.[22]

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[22] J. Habermas, "Life-Forms, Morality and the Task of the Philosopher", in Habermas: Autonomy and Solidarity, ed. P. Dews (London: Verso, 1986).

The notion that philosophers can "only rarely be useful people" echoes Foucault's rejection of the universal intellectual. In another interview Habermas admits:

> I would also expect a critical theory to perform the task of making enlightening interpretations of situations, which affect our self-understanding and orientate us in action. Even social theory would overstep its competence, however, if it undertook to project desirable forms of life.[23]

Comparing this with Foucault's late interpretation of his work it might seem that it is Foucault who is the more optimistic about the potential for critical thought:

> The critical ontology of ourselves has to be considered not, certainly as a theory, a doctrine, nor even as a permanent body of knowledge that is accumulating; it has to be conceived as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them. (WE,50)

Here is Habermas again:

> Nothing makes me more nervous than the imputation... that because the theory of communicative action focuses attention on the social facticity of recognised validity claims, it proposes, or at least suggests, a rationalistic utopian society. I do not regard the fully transparent society as an ideal, nor do I wish to suggest any other ideal - Marx was not the only one frightened by vestiges of utopian socialism.[24]

Obviously it might be considered a fairly simple task to selectively quote either thinker in order to emphasize their similar intentions and thus

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[23] J. Habermas, "A Philosophico-Political Profile", in Habermas: Autonomy and Solidarity, p. 171.

[24] J. Habermas, "A Reply to my Critics", in Habermas: Critical Debates, ed. J. B. Thompson and D. Held (London: Macmillan, 1982), p. 235.

completely obliterate the vital differences that surface in the actual process of their respective work; in what Foucault felicitously called "the patient labour giving form to our impatience for liberty." (WE,50) As I have argued, however, we have to on the most general level accept the comparability of Foucault's work with critical theories of society. At a superficial level this can be expressed as the inability of a critique of critical reason to fully escape the structure it wishes to undermine. Derrida's criticism of Foucault's attempt to write a history of madness in "itself, in its most vibrant state, before being captured by knowledge" is a specific example of this inability to stand outside of the historical workings of logocentric reason.[25]

In Madness and Civilisation, Foucault does in some way attempt to present an alternative to power that creates a stifling moral homogeneity, by suggesting that behind the processes initiated by the first 'humanitarian' techniques of the treatment of the insane, there lies a pure object madness whose "essence of its freedom" is its "solitary exaltation." (MC,265) Derrida argues that this is an delusion. Foucault cannot escape from the order of language to write the archaeology of a silence that is the murmuring of madness, without repeating reason's mastering of madness. For Derrida, an escape from the "totality of the historical language responsible for the exile of madness" is possible in only two ways. Either one does not write about the "silence", or one follows the madman's path of exile. There can be no challenge to reason except from within reason itself in the form of strategies and stratagems that undermine its claims to totalisation. To speak for madness would

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25 J. Derrida, "Cogito and the History of Madness", in Writing and Difference, tr. A. Bass (London: Routledge, 1978). Roy Boyne has argued for a fundamental convergence between Derrida and Foucault through the subject of the ethics of the Other in his Foucault and Derrida: The Other Side of Reason (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990).

only be to annex it once more, for madness as the other of reason is in essence what cannot be said. Foucault's claim to be writing a history of madness in itself, in order in some way to recover the other of modern reason that was repressed by a monologic discourse fails to provide an alternative to this discourse.

Derrida argues that Foucault's choice of the Classical age as the point when madness is mastered might seem arbitrary within the history of reason. Why not, for example, choose the point at which Socratic dialectic emerges from the undivided *Logos* of the pre-Socratics; this would leave the classical age without privilege or specificity. Ultimately, however, Derrida wants to suggest that to seek a point of origin where reason separates itself from its contrary, whatever this might be, is a contradictory aim anyhow. How can one write the history of this division if it is this division that first creates the possibility of the writing of history? This is what Foucault wishes to argue for when he says that:

> The *necessity of madness*, throughout the history of the West, is linked to the deciding gesture which detaches from the background noise, and from its continuous monotony, a meaningful language that is transmitted and consummated in time; briefly, it is linked to the *possibility of history*.[26]

Thus, ultimately he would be attempting a history of the possibility of history; a history of the common root of madness and reason; of the unity before the opposition between sense and non-sense. Derrida has doubts about this project and its intention to respect the purity of such a primitive unity. Madness cannot be considered to exist outside the historical conditions of its production and cannot function as the site for a critique of reason. The effect of Derrida's criticism can be seen in

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26 Quoted in "Cogito and the History of Madness", p. 42.

Foucault's subsequent repudiation of the inside/outside model of the critique of power and its corollary the repression hypothesis:

> The notion of repression is an insidious one, or at all events I myself have had much trouble in freeing myself of it... When I wrote *Madness and Civilisation*, I made at least an implicit use of this notion of repression. I think indeed that I was positing the existence of a sort of living, voluble and anxious madness which the mechanisms of power and psychiatry were supposed to have come to repress and reduce to silence. But it seems to me now that the notion of repression is quite inadequate for capturing what is precisely the productive aspect of power. (PK,118-9)

(ii) The Counter-discourse of Modernity

That there is no pure site where critique can achieve a complete separation from the determinations of its object is the guiding principle behind Foucault's endless rethinking of the relations between power and knowledge throughout his career. It is also the basis for arguing that his work has a deeply Nietzschean basis. This radical situatedness of critique in the languages, cultures and practices of its time is hardly a Nietzschean discovery, however. As Habermas points out, the desublimation of Hegel's idealistic philosophy began almost immediately after its appearance with the transformations of the Young Hegelians and moreover, Habermas wishes to argue that this is still the situation of consciousness today:

> The discourse of modernity, which we are still conducting down to our day, is also marked by the consciousness that philosophy is over, no matter whether this is perceived as a productive challenge or only as a provocation. (PDM,51-2)

As we have mentioned, Habermas orients his own narrative around an understanding of modernity as an unfinished task and certainly not

something that can be rejected totally because of the possibilities for oppression and domination it has also unleashed. The fact that Foucault fails to fully acknowledge this situation is for Habermas the source of his incoherencies. Foucault he argues does not think genealogically when it comes to his own genealogical historiography.

Habermas's understanding of the potentiality of Foucault's work differs immensely from that of Rajchman's. Basically he sees genealogy as being overtaken by a similar fate to that which Foucault had portrayed in the human sciences; it emerges as "precisely the presentistic, relativistic, cryptonormative illusory science that it does not want to be." (PDM,276) This fate arises from genealogy's "substitution of the hermeneutic elucidation of contexts of meaning for an analysis of structures that are meaningless in themselves"; a "substitution of validity claims for the power complexes they are functions of"; and the "substitution of justifying criticism for value-free historical explanations". Foucault on this interpretation attempts to be precisely the pure historian he had criticised so vehemently in his own work. For Habermas the claims that are advanced by genealogy are placed into question:

> (1) by the involuntary *presentism* of a historiography that remains hermeneutically stuck in its starting situation; (2) by the unavoidable *relativism* of an analysis related to the present that can understand itself only as a context-dependent practical enterprise; (3) by the arbitrary *partisanship* of a criticism that cannot account for its normative foundations. (PDM,276)

Foucault himself recognized these problems but according to Habermas failed to draw any conclusions from them. Here, Foucault's attempt to eliminate the hermeneutic situation of the historiographer arises from the position of a rejection of the philosophy of the subject. The

historiographer does not attempt to understand what social actors do and think through a fusion of horizons of meaning that can arise out of the context of tradition. Rather Foucault attempts to articulate the underlying practices that constitute the space where meaning occurs. As we have seen in Dreyfus and Rabinow's interpretation of Foucault, the historian brackets the very meaning of such practices in order to gain a critical distanciation upon them and to grasp them in their material structure. Habermas argues that even this attempt is betrayed by the fact that technologies of power and practices of domination are only explained by comparing them with one another. This is an inevitable hermeneutic process and a particular understanding of the modern age is in Foucault's work the unthematized starting point for this process.

Moreover, Foucault's objectivistic attitude sits uneasily with the Nietzschean reflection that the will to knowledge is born of malice, passion, instinct and devotion. As we have seen in the previous chapter, this unmasking of the objectivistic illusions of the will to knowledge leads to the understanding of history as a contemplation of the past solely in terms of the needs of the present. The difference that sets genealogy over other forms of will to knowledge is its linkage with disqualified, marginal forms of knowledge. (see chap 3 pp. 148-52) This for Habermas, is how Foucault attempts to avoid the problem of relativism. That is the problem of how the truth claims of his theory can be prevented from turning on the claims of genealogy. Subjugated knowledges are re-articulated through the action of genealogy and groups subordinated to the power of official knowledge find their medium of resistance in the practice of uncovering its own emergence. Genealogy takes the side of those who resist established practices of power but the definition of these practices is itself situated in a prior

web of power relationships.[27] Moreover, such a prior and inexhaustible conflict over the definition of power only allows for subjected knowledges to count as no more or no less once they too become victorious, and victory has to be the goal of any power if it is to exist along Foucault's schema.

According to Habermas, genealogical historiography aspires to be a strictly descriptive attitude, bracketing values and truth claims. There is no 'right side' behind the constellations of power. But, Habermas argues, Foucault understands himself as a dissident who offers resistance to modern thought and humanistically disguised disciplinary power. He is engaged throughout, despite his rhetorical statements to the contrary, for even a form of ascetic description is an engagement of sorts. He attempts to free himself from the traditional patterns of academic theoretical practice but even this is a position of a kind. Foucault writes, and for Habermas, the reason for this is precisely the point; he writes for a reason whatever this may turn out to be in a particular case. There is clearly no simple discharge of energy involved here. It is not that such a description might be possible but rather its possibility implies the "on-going transformation of the process of power analysis, not its new house."[28] More importantly for Habermas, these specific interventions congeal into a project with a critical thrust. Otherwise, parallelling Habermas's question 'why resist?' the question must also arise 'why write rather than not write?'

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27 Gary Wickham emphasizes the always contested nature of the definition of power for an understanding of Foucault's power analysis in "Power and Power Analysis: Beyond Foucault" in Towards a Critique of Foucault.

28 Ibid. p. 145.

In opposition to this reading Rajchman argues that Foucault does not want to improve the "language game of modern political theory (with its basic concepts of autonomy and heteronomy, morality, legality, emancipation and repression)". Rather he wants to undermine modernity and its language games. Genealogical history wages war against the forms of modern power because they no longer take the form of the models provided by Marx and Freud, of "legitimate power versus illegitimate power, or unconscious motives versus conscious motives". The critique of ideology presupposed by most critical theories only contributes to the danger of strengthening the normalizing forms of violence that are all pervasive and that invade bodies rather than consciousness. Disciplinary power functions without the detour through a necessarily false consciousness and hence is not prone to counter-discourse. Even so, Habermas ultimately wants to know why we should resist such all-pervasive power instead of just adapting to it? He argues that an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the opponent might make sense if one intends to fight but the question remains why fight at all? Habermas believes that only with the introduction of normative notions could Foucault begin to answer this question, and tell us what is wrong with the modern power/knowledge regime.

What compounds Foucault's position, for Habermas, is the fact that he does implicitly appeal to standard reasons for resisting.[29] These include the "asymmetrical relationship of power relationships, the reifying effect of technologies of power which violate the moral and bodily integrity of subjects capable of speech and action" and, the opaque nature of much of the effects of power/knowledge regimes. Foucault's development of the

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29 See Nancy Fraser, "Foucault on Modern Power: Empirical Insights and Normative Confusions", Praxis International 1, (1981):283.

concept bio-power functions by setting up a notion of the body as one objectified and disciplined by scientific techniques and structured by the various technologies of truth. According to Habermas, the body's experience of itself is taken to be the substrate of which these techniques operate upon, manipulating it, drilling it, objectifying it and stimulating it. In The History of Sexuality, Volume One Foucault appeals to a "different economy of bodies and pleasures" which might function as a standard for our revolt in the present but this can easily be dismissed as utopian dreaming, especially if Foucault's thesis that there is no body behind the discourse that articulates it is taken seriously.[30]

Habermas argues that Foucault wants to "*leave behind modernity's presentist consciousness of time.*" This consists in a break with the privileging of the present in which the future is faced responsibly and the past is narcissitically related to. Hence, genealogy is not supposed to search for an origin, but to uncover the contingent beginnings of discourse formations, to analyze the multiplicity of factual histories of derivation and to dissolve the identity of the history-writing subject and of her contemporaries. From this there is the renunciation of a hermeneutics that links the historian with her object in an "effective history". History for Foucault cannot be the anthropological collective consciousness that makes use of material documents to refresh its memory. It is part of my argument that Foucault does indeed challenge the presentist notion of time but to insist that this refuses the notion of "effective history" is short-sighted. Certainly the notion of "effective history" as developed by Gadamer and which privileges the inevitable continuity of tradition in the hermeneutical situation of the present, would appear as a much to rapid universalization of the will to

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[30] See Minson's criticisms in Genealogies of Morals, p. 41.

understand for Foucault. Its historical emergence as a philosophical theory could easily be traced in order to show its complicities with all those 'bad' Enlightenment strategies of inner and outer domination. The genealogy that traces the lowly descent of a universal philosophical hermeneutics would thus apply a critical standard of its own, however. It is precisely such a situation that philosophical hermeneutics seeks to ontologize in order to characterize thinking as a much less transcendent achievement or work of man.

Habermas argues that modern time consciousness first articulated philosophically by Hegel, has been continually renewed by radical historical thinking: from the Young Hegelians through Nietzsche to Heidegger and beyond. This radical historical thinking is characterised by the idea of "effective history" (*Wirkungsgeschicte*) in which the central conceptual thematization is the notion of an "horizon open to the future which is determined by expectations in the present and which guides our access to the past." Insofar as we appropriate past experiences with an orientation to the future, the authentic present is preserved as the locus of continuing tradition and of innovation at once. Benjamin, for example, sought such an "effective history" through an anticipation of what is new in the future via a remembering of a past that has been suppressed. This is the "revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past".[31] This liberating power of memory is not in order to escape the past's burden on the present, but to contribute to the dissolution of a guilt on the part of the present with respect to the past. Benjamin's extension of the future-oriented responsibility to past times is Habermas argues: "a decentring counterpoise to the dangerous

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31 W. Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History", in Illuminations, tr. H. Zohn (London: Fontana, 1970), p. 265.

concentration of responsibility that modern time-consciousness, oriented exclusively toward the future, has laid on the shoulders of a problematic present." (PDM,15-16) Such a decentring, I would suggest, is the inevitable ethical thrust of Foucault's dispersive strategy insofar as it directs us away from the future-oriented notion of political practice towards the site of a radically indecidable and fragile present where such understandings of time and history are always contestations of power. This is not to argue that Foucault's own understandings of such contestations are without their limitations, however, as I will argue in the next two chapters.

Habermas's critique of Foucault seeks to question his work by bringing out what he would term half-formulated assumptions and logical incoherencies. According to him, Foucault did provide an illuminating critique of the entanglement of the human sciences in the philosophy of the subject, but he failed to think through the aporias of his own position. Ultimately he is trapped in a relativist self-denial and is unable to give a normative account of his position. Habermas's proposed solution to the philosophy of the subject is the replacement of it by the paradigm of mutual understanding between subjects capable of speech and action. This prevents the objectifying perspective of the isolated subject that is just one entity in the world. The perspective of participation in "linguistically mediated interaction" enables the circumvention of the "transcendental-empirical doubling of the relation to the self" which sees itself as either constitutive of the world or just one entity in that world. For Habermas, all that is required is a simple change of paradigm to render obsolete Foucault's perilous dynamics of a subjectivity that is bent on knowledge and falls prey to "pseudo-sciences". It is only if reason is seen to be a universal power bent upon

self-assertion and self-aggrandizement, subjugating everything around it as an object, that the other of reason can be postulated as spontaneous, creative and linked to a pre-discursive realm. Habermas questions this exclusive conception of reason and because Foucault cannot appeal to reason's other himself, he is taken to have been caught in aporias by not himself questioning this exclusive conception. Habermas argues that Foucault wants to:

> initiate a *special discourse* that claims to operate *outside* the horizon of reason without being utterly irrational. To be sure, this merely shifts the paradox. (PDM,308)

This paradox takes the form of a tension throughout Foucault's work which is reduced through a emphasis upon one or the other side of the problem throughout his career. On the one hand, he lays claim to a form of objectivity in his archaeology and rejects hermeneutics in favour of a "contented positivism", on the other hand he never gives up the Nietzschean insistence on the interminability of interpretation. For someone such as Dews, Foucault's "shifting perspectives... do powerfully illuminate, but at the same time fall victim to, the contradictory processes which they address."[32] However, what is perceived as a weakness here can equally be viewed from the interminability of interpretation as productive.

The productivity of this vacillation can be best understood if we return to the analysis given by Dreyfus and Rabinow of Foucault's overcoming of hermeneutics. Together with a concentration on Foucault's specifically historiographical problematic; the presentism, relativism and cryptonormativism that Habermas finds so debilitating, this attempt at an

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32 Logics of Disintegration, p. 232.

overcoming of hermeneutics might be seen in another light. Richard Palmer argues, in an essay in response to Dreyfus, that he is "led by a Foucaultian conception of hermeneutics to 'frame' Heidegger with a narrower conception than Heidegger's text calls for."[33] Palmer wishes to argue that it would be wrong to see Heidegger attempting to move beyond hermeneutics insofar as he never gives up thinking on the process of interpretation. Similarly, it is possible to argue that Foucault himself, never goes beyond interpretation insofar as he constantly reflects upon his own practice in relation to its historical situation. Foucault's draft proposals for the specific intellectual is part of this reflection, as are his thoughts upon the nature of resistance and his seemingly interminable (correctly so) analyses of the nature of power. On a more general level, the tension between history as meaning and history as difference, that is hardly resolved in Foucault's work, is the source of a "bad infinite" in which, as Gadamer puts it: "the end keeps on delaying its arrival".[34] For Gadamer: "It is precisely the unilluminable obscurity of our facticity - which Heidegger called 'thrownness' - that sustains and does not merely set limits to the project character of human *Dasein*."[35]

This interpretation of Foucault would realign his relationship to critical theory via a hermeneutical critique of its aspirations. It would then be possible to reinterpret Rajchman's view of Foucault, as excessively idealist in the sense previously attributed to the naive view of critical

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33 R. E. Palmer, "On the Transcendability of Hermeneutics", In Hermeneutics: Questions and Prospects, ed. G. Shapiro and A. Sica (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1985), p. 86.

34 H. G. Gadamer, "The Heritage of Hegel", in Reason in the Age of Science, tr. F. G. Lawrence (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1981), p. 40.

35 Ibid.

theory. One example of this is Rajchman's argument that for Foucault the point of doing philosophy is to occasion new ways of thinking about the forms of experience around which there exists struggle. On this model, to discover the sources of our knowledge, experience, and practices is to alter the nature of the debates and struggles that are the product of such discourses and thus to alter the discourse that forms our experience. This practice, accordingly, releases the power such things have over us. Such a romantic view of the philosophical enterprise is precisely what critical theory sets out to correct through its situating and concretization of reason in history, society, body, and language. The extent to which this situating of critique in the facticity of life reduces the initial promises of enlightenment and emancipation is the starting point for the critical theorist.[36]

Rajchman's description of Foucault as a philosopher of dispersion and singularity is, I have argued, accurate but to further characterise this as providing a new philosophy of freedom is not without its difficulties. The suspension of judgement about systematic schemes, unified narratives, universalist history, human nature, etc. is not without its price in terms of a positive will to dispersion that ultimately works through a certain parasiticism on the overturned values. This is also the case in his analysis of power which relies upon a reversal of the ordinary understanding of power as a zero-sum phenomena. Even though such an ordinary notion must surely be questioned, the positive force of Foucault's own reevaluation arises precisely through the new (pessimistic?) vision of social existence expressed in the power-knowledge couplet. To the extent that this new understanding precludes the choice between powers, then critical theorists are right to be

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[36] See footnote 15 above.

suspicious of its own tendencies towards becoming a master-name in social analysis.

However, insofar as Foucault's permanent questioning proceeds case by case and is not a total skepticism, its relationship with hermeneutical philosophy conceived of as a practical philosophy becomes less remote. Rajchman argues that the procedure of critique is enmeshed in concrete cases and aims not to produce certainty in specific areas but to open up new possibilities for thought or action. One could draw comparisons with the fundamental thrust of the practical philosophy proposed by Gadamer in which the crucial self-understanding is of human finitude in relation to its attempt to understand the world. Foucault also vehemently rejects the notion that one needs to understand the totality of social reality in order to comprehend it or change it. This is especially the case in the comprehension of power relationships which do not exhibit a unified totality in the first place. Instead, Foucault's proposal to analyse the "micro-physics" of power emphasizes the importance of understanding the actual everyday sites and processes where power is exercised because it is only at such an immediate and local level that an effective understanding of how to negotiate and confront power can be had. It is only through such finite comprehension that an effective understanding of wider power structures can also be made possible. Moreover, it is only through resisting at such micro-levels that the possibility of changing these larger structures is possible. The desire to understand the whole before one engages in resistance is not only an impossible desire but can actually lead to greater structures of oppression and is always prone to the outcome of apathy or pessimism.

So, although Foucault rightly gives up the hope of universal progress he does not abandon all ideas of emancipation, if by that one means the resistance at particular points to local exercises of power. Foucault's critique would be in some sense a critique of the desire to have a total understanding of society before engaging in specific change of that society. Showing historically that this desire for total understanding has actually increased dominatory power structures would itself be an important task. Rorty sees Foucault's critical histories as correctly subverting the quasi-metaphysical comfort implied by Habermas's argument for the necessity of presupposing convergence in the long run on the rational standards of an "ideal speech community". Foucault argued that he was not trying to "formulate the global systematic theory which holds everything in place, but to analyse the specificity of mechanisms of power... to build little by little a strategic knowledge". (PK,131) However, one might still ask why such strategic knowledge is necessary. What is the purpose of genealogical histories of contemporary power relations if they ultimately stand as temporary interventions? The feeling that there is a tacit moral critique behind Foucault's work that he never fully acknowledges is something that is bound to constantly occur to the reader. It is important to acknowledge that Foucault worked within the established academic world even whilst declaring war on its established structures and disciplines. Working within the overall discipline of language and its rules of plausibility it seems difficult not to bring some notion of wider social responsibility into his work conceived of as an intervention into social existence. Despite what might be misplaced calls for normative grounding from Habermas, there is still a deep commitment to normative reversal and dispersal that functions as the driving force behind the power of Foucault's work. Whether Foucault can function as a specific intellectual dealing in non-systematic

interventions in the present system without in some way contradicting his avowed neutrality as to what should be done is an important question that I will address in the following chapters. In particular, I will argue that the drive for dispersion that underpins this neutrality relies upon a simple reversal of the imaginative refiguration of identities to be found in the search for utopias, understood as fragile expressions of desire without totalizing pretensions.

Chapter 5

Between Ideology and Utopia: The Indeterminacies of the Intellectual

(i) The Interests of the Present

Habermas tells us that what impressed him when he first met Foucault in 1983 was:

> the tension, which resists easy categorisation, between the almost serene scientific reserve of the scholar striving for objectivity on the one hand, and, on the other, the political vitality of the vulnerable, subjectively excitable, morally sensitive intellectual.[1]

He argues that in Foucault "the stoic attitude of the observer who keeps his precise distance, obsessed with objectivity, was combined with the opposite element of passionate self-consuming participation in the reality of the historical moment."[2] It is this tension that I have characterised as the site of Foucault's productive challenge to the present. Yet, given his Nietzschean rejection of the ascetic ideals of disinterested thought, it seems perverse to characterise a major element of the style of his thought as serenely striving for objectivity. In this chapter I want to begin to open out the normative levels of Foucault's work by siting this tension along the lines of the couplet ideology/utopia both in relation to the ethic of the intellectual and in relation to the refiguration of the social understood in Foucault's terms as the transgression of the present.

Habermas's characterisation echoes Bernstein's analysis of the impossible contradictions between objectivism and relativism or subjectivism, presumably to suggest that Foucault failed to move beyond this simple but constraining framework (see pp. 10-13 above). For Habermas this

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1 Jürgen Habermas, "Taking Aim at the Heart of the Present", in Foucault: A Critical Reader, p. 103.
2 Id.

tension is the site of productive contradictions characteristic of complex thinking but nevertheless also symptomatic of a deficiency. The essence of Foucault's critical thrust, the tearing down of the illusions of natural categories, is carried out by dispersive archaeological and genealogical studies of social practices but itself oscillates between the twin evils of objectivism and subjectivism. That the institution of the "will to truth" is an integral element in this critique is it seems ignored.

For Habermas, the point at which Foucault's thought remains undeveloped is the point where he baulks at the prospect of proposing or producing alternatives to the practices he so effectively criticizes. As we have seen in chapter four, this, according to Habermas, is a product of his neo-conservatism, a product of the groundlessness of his critique. A sympathetic reading of Foucault's position would be to emphasize his sceptical notion of freedom and would emphasize the transgressive as opposed to productive nature of the work of freedom.[3] The question is whether this transgressive element can function without a corresponding affirmative project, as Foucault seems to imply at times. The notion of a critique that functions solely via destruction without affirmation of something would be pointless. (Here one should perhaps simply note the implicit tautology of critique requiring a point being synonymous with critique as affirming some point.) The notion of critique as simply destruction of all fast-frozen values and assumptions might sound more feasible and attractive, yet even this process functions from a site.

Foucault does have in some sense of the word a place from which he practices his critique despite the radical claim that his discourse "far

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[3] See Charles C. Lemert and Garth Gillan, Michel Foucault: Social Theory and Transgression (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), for a reading of Foucault's social theory along these lines.

from determining the locus in which it speaks, is avoiding the ground on which it could find support." (AK,205) If we were to take one sense of the word critique, that of a judgement through a division, then we can say that much of Foucault's rhetoric and tone follows this practice. This would include: his narrative of the birth of the asylum out of a relatively sudden new practice of dividing the inmates of general hospitals; his narrative of the birth of modern clinical medicine in the space of a few years at the beginning of the nineteenth century; his account of the ruptures that shifted the *épistemes* of the language, economics and life; the dramatic division between punishment in the classical and the modern age, and so on. Even though we have to be wary of characterising Foucault as a historian of discontinuity and radical difference, it would not be entirely wrong to emphasize that his critique of the present works upon the principle of judgement understood as division. At this point one would have to qualify this characterisation, however. Much of the criticism directed against Foucault himself is because he apparently does not make any positive judgements as to how one should proceed in the present. This is Habermas's point when he asks of Foucault's work "Why resist rather than acquiesce?" (PDM,284) This question is justified even in such a general form and there are two possible answers to it with respect to the work of Foucault. The first would be the response Foucault himself sometimes gives when placed upon the spot to justify his writing:

> Do not ask who I am and do not ask me to remain the same: leave it to our bureaucrats and our police to see that our papers are in order. At least spare us their morality when we write. (AK,17)

Such a reply implies that Foucault is claiming a special status for his writing that does not have to answer to the normal ethico-political

demands of justification. This attitude does not consist of complete detachment but is allied with the non-programmatic role of the intellectual:

> To say to oneself at the outset: what reform will I be able to carry out? That is not, I believe, an aim for the intellectual to pursue. His role, since he works specifically in the realm of thought, is to see how far the liberation of thought can make ... transformations urgent enough for people to want to carry them out. (PPC,155)

This is perhaps a standard view of Foucault. A view that takes him to be engaged in criticism in the realm of thought with its own standards and methods and to be a thinker who is an endless sceptic, constantly questioning our constituted experience.

From this perspective it would be wrong to expect Foucault to produce a programme for either the individual or the collectivity. Instead the role of the intellectual qua intellectual is simply to question. It is only as a citizen that the concrete process of choosing how to live is debated and practised. This of course, seemingly creates a tremendous divide between the private and public domains of living and thinking which not only seems artificial but also inadequate. That Foucault does not actually hold to such a deep division between the role of the intellectual and that of the citizen is apparent in his notion of the "specific intellectual". (PK,126-31) His entire tone is that of the engaged intellectual whose thinking has a bearing upon the way we live, to the extent that he has been adjudged to be the bearer of Sartre's mantle of the popularizing philosopher.[4] Yet at the same time there is a peculiar quality to Foucault's work that one can only call ascetic. It is as if Foucault

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[4] See for example, J. G. Merquior, Foucault (London: Fontana, 1985), pp. 157-8.

wanted to purge his thinking of any of the uneasiness and undecidability of politics and ethics even as he was pointing out the complexities and fragilities of the practices that have come to define and constitute us.

The second response to the charge of non-commitment and apolitics is to argue that Foucault does indeed have a tacit politics of a kind which is simply not fully articulated by himself. Again such a response has to be qualified. It is not as if Foucault has a systematic political programme behind his work which he has either consciously or unconsciously suppressed. The one thing that it is important to emphasize concerning the style of Foucault's work is its distrust of totality and of general ethical or political values that can be universalized for all times and all people. At the same time this tendency towards unsystematicity and fragmentation is itself a position defined by just such values. The second possible response I want to bring out in reply to the charge of apolitics, however, is not just concerned with the argument that even the endless practice of dispersion and decentring is itself some kind of political or ethical programme. If this were the case then the second response would not be much different from the first outlined above. Rather I would argue that it is possible to see Foucault's criticism as not working from a non-site (something that is at the least hard to conceive anyway) but from the site of the possible future of the present. This would be to insert his work back into the tradition of political and ethical critique that looks to the future for practice in the present. Of course, this might be considered a simplification of Foucault's attempt to question the forms of traditional political practice. However, I do not think that it is to distort his own practice. Rather it is to develop what is implicit within it instead of covering it over with

assertions either of his apoliticalness and relativism, or of his dismantling of the traditional connections between theory and politics.

While it might seem incongruous to place Foucault's work within the tradition of utopian thought it would not be entirely unjustified. A statement that is usually taken to task by critics when discussing his alleged incoherent stance is his musing about the possibilities for the body in the future:

> Moreover, we need to consider the possibility that one day, perhaps, in a different economy of bodies and pleasures, people will no longer quite understand how the ruses of sexuality, and the power that sustains its organization, were able to subject us to that austere monarchy of sex, so that we became dedicated to the endless task of forcing its secret, of exacting the truest of confessions from a shadow. (HS,1,159)

This appeal to "a different economy of bodies and pleasures" is of course very vague and abstract. It can be interpreted as Foucault's admittance that in order to resist our present practices it has to be in the name of alternative ones. It is then open to the charge of utopianism in the common sense of transcendental ideals that are impossible to fulfil in reality. However, it is hardly likely that Foucault is advocating anything here more than thinking that our present practices might appear eccentric to others in the future. A different economy of bodies and pleasure is open to be filled with whatever content that might appear. Foucault's appeal is not to a positive content but to the possibility of thinking and acting otherwise. In one sense this is where his theory is at its most traditional. That is in the sense that he is not pessimistic about the fact that there is the possibility for substantial change despite all his pessimism about the systems and practices in which human beings have entrapped themselves.

Of course it would be a gross injustice to Foucault to claim that he projects a possible future which can stand in a critical relation to the present. He simply does not do this as we can see even in the above quote with its careful conditional style. Equally, it would be an absurdity to claim that Foucault projects a critique of the present from the nostalgic longing for a past golden age to be recovered in the present. Even the postulation of a different economy of bodies and pleasures does not imply a better economy (although from Foucault's tone and critique of existing practices of sexuality it might seem so). It could from Foucault's point of view be no better or even worse than our present practices as well as possibly being an improvement. All that one can say is that there is the possibility of a different regime, not that we can evaluate it in relation to our own. In this sense the future that is appealed to here is not one that has connections with the present and so allows of some comparison. Rather it is a future which has no other connection with the present than its negation. This would be the most ascetic version of Foucault's critique of the present. On the other hand it can be modified to appear more concrete by arguing that the future that is appealed to is conceived of as the realisation and fulfilment of elements already existent in present society. This is not what Foucault himself imagines the negation to consist of and is the cause of much of the criticism of his work for not being directly applicable to political struggle in the present. (This however, is hardly a criticism that can be made of Foucault without qualification) Criticism of Foucault for not concretizing his appeal to other possibilities is perhaps, however, the point at which one can understand just how he does practice critique and why there might be incoherencies and weaknesses in his position.

(ii) The Vicissitudes of the Present

When the relationship between the present and the future is articulated in terms of a inadequate present and a possible future that in some ways could redeem these inadequacies, then it is important to be clear on how we are to understand the crossing of the distance between the two. Certainly, to conceive the future as nothing but the negation of the present in order to bring out the contingencies of present practices, leaves little indication of how we are to proceed in the present to exercise our freedom. It makes the notion of resistance to the present quite like a leap of faith that the future despite its indeterminacy will be better. If it is not to be better then the decision to resist does appear as a whim.

This is why the notion of the future as the realisation of elements already existent in the present provides a better account for the practice of emancipation. It also lessens the suspicion that the present is being conceived of as deficient in relation to the fulfilment of the future. The present is not simply being understood as that which necessarily requires a completion in the future but as the possibility of such development. Whether this model is sufficiently non-teleological to avoid the dangers associated with the notion of a deficient present is another question. The idea that the future is not a total negation of the present but a reality which can be positively, though partially found in the present enables one to justify one's actions with much more ease (this of course is no justification for the acceptance of such a model). From this perspective, if there is a utopian element in Foucault's thought it is because at a meta-level, his textual production does

implicitly appeal to another time where our present practices will appear alien. This is the negative thrust of his critique in that the transcendence of the present is given no content other than the pure possibility of transcendence. It might be said that it is negative only in the sense that it avoids depicting the concrete features of a better society. However, precisely because Foucault refuses to propose specific alternatives to present practices, it might be argued that he has to start from an analysis of the present in order to find future concrete possibilities for transformation. Now Foucault's analyses are steeped in the present in the sense that they always aim at understanding present experiences, yet one would be hard pressed to find concrete proposals for future practice emerging from these studies. Because of the virtual absence of such proposals to the point of puritanism, it would be hard to adjudge this aspect of Foucault's work as merely his acceptance of its limitations. It is an aspect of his work that one has to explain and I think can be explained by a number of reasons. Primarily it is to be explained by his distrust of the notion that intellectuals have to propound strategies for action that others (the masses) should follow. Such a fear is justified in some respects, especially given the appropriation of Leninist notions of the importation of revolution into the masses in the twentieth century. It is not necessarily a reason why intellectuals should shun all notions of producing concrete or even ideal goals, however. To argue that one should not produce political or ethical goals through the use of theory because of the dangers of the tyranny of ideas is perhaps to overestimate the efficacy of theory emanating from the academy in the first place, and underestimate its use in ordinary understanding in the second.

Now to point out that Foucault stops short of providing concrete proposals for transformation is not a criticism of his work in itself. It is perfectly within reason not to want to use one's position in society to impose one's interpretation of what is to be done.[5] It is moreover perhaps a virtue given the powers that can accrue to an intellectual purely as an intellectual.[6] However, what must be dismissed is Foucault's claims that the very nature of his work leads to such a position in the first place. Indeed such a claim seems to hint that there can be value-free theory, history, or sociology.

At this point it would be wise to acknowledge that for much of the time Foucault does not characterise his intellectual practice as value-free. The whole point of his genealogies is to be an intervention in present struggles. It is because of this, however, that Habermas's accusation of "crypto-normativism" carries such force. It is the very fact that Foucault presents his work as somehow above the claims to truth that animate the practices he studies and yet reserves the capability to pronounce upon the unacknowledged dangers of such practices that Habermas objects to.

It might appear that Habermas is talking past Foucault here, however. For it is not as if Foucault does not acknowledge the irredeemably normative nature of all intellectual practice. Habermas's demand that he explicitly acknowledges this in his work might seem superfluous in the late twentieth century. Quite simply put, within the context of the

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5 This is the view adopted by, for example, by Weber. See Max Weber Methodology of the Social Sciences, tr. and ed. by E. Shils and H. Finch (New York, Free Press, 1949), pp. 2-3.

6 The problem of specific intellectuals encroaching upon areas outside of their particular competence, such as doctors and lawyers claiming greater political competence by virtue of their profession is one such dangerous aspect of this phenomenon.

intellectual debates between someone such as Habermas and those he accuses of anti-Enlightenment values such as Derrida, Heidegger, and Foucault, there is a common frame of debate in that all believe there cannot be a foundation or ground for ethical or political values and that every position is value-laden through the very nature of being a position in the first place. It would then appear that it is Habermas who is being irrational in demanding of someone the very grounds that he himself does not actually believe are possible to give. Of course, this is to present an interpretation of Habermas's own position that tones down the quasi-transcendentalism of the ideal speech situation he proposes as the regulative ideal present in all communication.[7] It is also to tone down Foucault's more extravagant claims about the birth of modern rationalism and science from the same ignoble origins as the lunatic asylum and the prison. Not that Foucault argues so dogmatically, but Habermas's interpretation of him fixes upon this suspicion of Foucault's to the exclusion of the complexities that he articulates about the birth of modern reason and its connection with other more dangerous practices of dividing, exclusion and objectivication.

It would be too easy to argue that Foucault has given up on the practice of truth claims; that all he writes is indeed only fiction designed to have effects but with no claim to be a better interpretation than any other. If this were the case then Habermas's charge that Foucault is caught within a performative contradiction would have some bite. For it would mean that one would be able to claim for the simple narrative of Enlightenment progress the same status as Foucault's interpretation of modernity. This simple narrative would include not only

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7 See Richard Bernstein's attempt to do just this in his Beyond Objectivism and Relativism.

the privileging of reason and its power of emancipation, but also the notion that there are subjects who are in control of their destiny through the transcendentalism of consciousness. As a fiction this story would have no less claim to being heard than Foucault's, and its effects would have equal status with the effects Foucault himself creates through his genealogical histories. Such a situation is obviously not what Foucault intends. That such a situation exists meta-theoretically he would not deny. The conflict of interpretations is a brute fact that cannot be overcome. It is at this point that Habermas wants reflection upon what makes one interpretation better than another and for him this has to be the "force of the better argument". Just what this appeal to the 'better argument' consists of, who decides what is and what is not an argument, and what criteria constitutes the better argument is of course not something that can be stated once and for all. In regard to Habermas's own position upon this situation of the plurality of universes of discourse it would be a gross misreading to argue that he believes that there can be a consensus wrought purely from dialogue.[8] Foucault would agree with this scenario and yet his own work is shot through with the disinclination to reflect upon its own status as discourse. Whether this is such a critical fault as Habermas believes depends upon one's view of the situation of the plurality of interpretations in the first place.

To argue that there is an irreducible plurality of interpretations of the world can for some, imply that every interpretation is relative and hence no interpretation is valid. Such a belief is a consequence of what

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8 On this point see Dieter Misgeld, "Modernity and Hermeneutics: A Critical-Theoretical Rejoinder" in Gadamer and Hermeneutics, ed. with an Introduction by Hugh J. Silverman (London and New York: Routledge, 1991).

Richard Bernstein has called the "Cartesian Anxiety".[9] The search for an Archimedian point upon which to ground knowledge finds its first *locus classicus* in modern philosophy in Descartes' Meditations. Such a desire for one induitable principle is set up to be necessary by Descartes by situating its search within a journey of the soul which is beset by the terrifying possibilities of madness, darkness, evil demons, and drowning. Bernstein points out that the "spectre that hovers in the background of this journey is not just radical epistemological skepticism but the dread of madness and chaos where nothing is fixed, where we can neither touch bottom nor support ourselves on the surface."[10] Descartes sets up an apparently inescapable Either/Or according to Bernstein that has plagued modern philosophy ever since:

> Either there is some support for our being, a fixed foundation for our knowledge, or we cannot escape the forces of darkness that envelop us with madness, with intellectual and moral chaos.[11]

It is this problematic or dichotomy between objectivism and relativism that Bernstein wishes to explore and ultimately dissolve in a Wittgensteinian manner as a non-problem. In so far as it is a problem to be addressed it is thus one that is to be solved therapeutically by showing that the dilemma that Descartes and other philosophers have placed us in is artificial. The attempt to ground our knowledge and values is a product of the anxiety we might existentially feel as a result of the very groundlessness of our knowledge and beliefs. As such, it is a product of immaturity, of an inability to come to terms with reality. Bernstein's reading of the situation is therefore, not just as something to be dismissed as a blind alley. Rather, it is an anxiety that has to be

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9 Beyond Objectivism and Relativism, p. 16.
10 Ibid.
11 Id.

worked through in order to "exorcize the Cartesian Anxiety and liberate ourselves from its seductive appeal."[12] This process leads in some sense to enlightenment in the classic Kantian sense of maturity (*Mundigkeit*). A similar view about our response to the groundlessness of life is developed by another American, J. D. Caputo, in which the situation of radical uprootedness is to be confronted unwaveringly with a stoical heroicism.[13]

What Bernstein and Caputo both take to be the unmitigated positive possibilities to be had from facing up to such a situation is for someone such as Habermas of itself a danger. To accept the nature of the situation as unavoidable is one thing. This is what Habermas both implicitly and explicitly does himself in the development of his theory of communicative action oriented to mutual understanding. It is, however, another thing to celebrate plurality and difference for its own sake, for this can so easily slip into a kind of irrationalist disregard for argument and dialogue. The notion of slippage here is very interesting insofar as the claims of communicative action are designed to prevent it from ever contaminating the primary social good of uncoerced deliberation and evaluation. To be fair to Foucault, he does not simply celebrate or universalize the notion of difference. However, although his concern to "make differences: to constitute them as objects, to analyse them, and to define their concept" (AK,205) is a process with specific political effects in mind, just what these effects are is never fully thematized by Foucault. In this sense, it It is not unreasonable to see them as being the redressing of "asymmetric relationships between powerholders and those subject to power, as well as the reifying effect of technologies of

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[12] Ibid. p. 19.

[13] J. Caputo Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction and the Hermeneutic Project (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1987).

power, which violate the moral and bodily integrity of subjects capable of speech and action" (PDM,284)

This interpretation of Foucault's position goes against the grain of much of his attempt to dismantle the sovereignty of the subject. It is an interpretation that sees this attempt as failing in the sense that he himself remains caught in the political paradigms that are nourished by the sovereignty of consciousness. According to Mark Cousins and Athar Hussain, Foucault has not resolved the problem of the subject, or the possibility of the science of the individual, he has merely abandoned it with good reason.[14] They argue that Foucault provides a way of analysing social practices by focusing upon specific problematics. They argue that Foucault provides a way of analysing social practices by focusing upon specific problematics. These specific analyses circumvent the need for a general theory of the subject but nevertheless this does not do away with the problem of the subject as one that can arise in social analysis. Indeed, they argue that it surfaces in Foucault's own notion of "*assujettisement*". The technologies of subjectification that Foucault hypothesizes function by working on material which they argue has to be conceived in some basic sense as human being. The effects that these technologies have may indeed be systematic and liable to analysis but Cousins and Hussain's question is whether an analysis of the successes and failures of techniques of individuation can proceed by bracketing off the nature of the material on which those techniques work. A successful bracketing issues in a form of behaviourism which still assumes that human beings are a *tabula rasa*, and thus also carries with it a theory of the subject. This is why they argue that it is

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14 Mark Cousins and Athar Hussain, Michel Foucault, (London: Macmillan, 1984), p. 255.

necessary to at least assume that the material upon which techniques of subjectification work is already differentiated.

In as much as Foucault gestures towards new ways of understanding the body he has to be necessarily vague and cryptic in order to avoid repetition of present understandings. This explains his comment that: "to imagine another system is to extend our participation in the present system." (LCP,230) How is one to understand this comment? At first it seems as if it is a straightforward rejection of utopian thinking that separates itself off from the concrete realities of the present in order to set up another system floating in the realm of ideas. To simply imagine another system is not to escape the present one, it is only to tie oneself more closely to that which is the cause of imagining through a kind of negative reaction formation. From this perspective it would seem that what is being advocated is real change in the present system to eliminate the need for the imagining in the first place. This is very much Marx's argument about the phenomena of religion or indeed ideology in general.[15] However, I think that Foucault intends this remark to stand as a much more specific point about the nature and danger of imagining other regimes, systems or societies as replacements for our present ones. It is not the possibility of imagining otherwise that is the danger (Foucault makes this his critical slogan at many points in his work), rather the danger is the imagining of other rigourous systems such as the communist society that are to be implemented dogmatically.[16] Once again we are returned to Foucault's

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15 K. Marx, "Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right" in Early Writings, ed L Colletti (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), pp. 244-5.

16 Concomitant with this is the notion that the detailed imaginings of alternative societies actually contribute to the spread of oppressive modern power structures through their usage in the workings of "bio-power".

fear of the practice of creating alternatives to our present practices and the dogmas that they can so easily produce.

I think it is necessary to be clear about this difference between specific programmes for the transformation of society and the principle of change in general in Foucault's work. Foucault is unambiguous about the importance of critique being "the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them." (WE,50) This is something he stresses repeatedly throughout his work. It is when Foucault refuses to indicate the possibilities in going beyond such limits that he begins to get into trouble. It is not only that this refusal leads critics of Foucault to dub him a neo-conservative because of an apparent dislike of radical transformation. Rather it is hard to see how Foucault can justify such a quietist position within the terms of his own argument about the contingent historicality of society. If it is the preeminent role of the intellectual to engage in an historical analysis of the limits imposed on us then the experiment with the possibility of going beyond these limits is also an important task; one that cannot be done systematically by everyone in society. The engaged intellectual should not shirk this task through an argument that all such experiments lead to nightmare regimes that perpetuate and deepen the dangers of the present. Such an argument is itself a sweeping generalisation and thus susceptible to refutation. It not only implies that the possibility of all visionary ethical and political ideals degenerating into dogmatism necessarily means that they should be abandoned, but also surprisingly overestimates the causal efficacy of such ideals in the real world.

This is, of course, not to deny the importance of Foucault's insistence upon the preeminence of connecting the specific intellectual's work to the "daily struggles at grass roots level" of those whose fight is "located in the fine meshes of the web of power." (PK,116) That this connection has to be made is hardly a surprising one, however. The crux of the problem is not that Foucault does not offer hints for resistance but that he does not regard these hints as arising from a particular position in the first place. It is one thing to provide local analyses and specific genealogical histories of present practices in order for them to be used by others as they wish in their own struggles; it is another not to recognize that such intellectual tools emerge from their own specific history and bear their own interests and values. For Foucault not to reflect upon the status of the tools (or rather texts) he produces for the use of others leaves a serious lacuna in his own reflection.

One might see this as merely the resolute acceptance of the groundlessness of his production. It would from this perspective be churlish to demand of Foucault grounds for his work when he has merely by-passed this problem as a non-problem; as something that cannot be provided. This, however, does not excuse Foucault from providing an understanding of this situation of groundlessness and its implication for ethics and politics. That some have found this implication to be intolerable explains the continued demand for something more than just "the cool facade of radical historicism." (PDM,275) and the reluctance to let Foucault off lightly when he says there is danger in everything:

> My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad. If

> everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do.[17]

This distinction between bad and dangerous may be permissible in regard to one's existential attitude towards the world but as soon as one attempts to specify the dangers of the present, one has to have criteria as to why they are dangers and for whom. Foucault explains that this attitude leads not to "apathy but to a hyper- and pessimistic activism" and one might wonder why this is so? In what way does the recognition that the world is a dangerous place lead to activism instead of passive withdrawal? The answer of course is because the dangers of the world are to be evaluated, as Foucault himself immediately insists upon:

> I think that the ethico-political choice we have to make every day is to determine which is the main danger.[18]

Indeed, it is not just that the dangers are to be described neutrally and then evaluated as to which have to be given priority; the very decision to pronounce everything as potentially dangerous is an evaluative one in the first place. Moreover, it is an evaluation which displays a far more utopian attitude to the scope of critical thought than Foucault is prepared to acknowledge. Foucault cannot have it both ways. He cannot argue that critique can only succeed by becoming local, specific and contingent and justify this by a universal appeal to the danger of everything. Certainly one can sympathise with the attitude of constant vigilance but one should not forget that such an attitude is one specific cultural response amongst others. Just how specific such a response this is, is pointed out by Foucault himself in his text "What is Enlightenment?". Here, he quite remarkably suggests that it was Kant

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[17] Michel Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics" in The Foucault Reader, p. 343.
[18] Ibid.

that initiated a new way of thinking about philosophy and its relation to the historical present. It is Kant who first asks, according to Foucault, "What are we? in a very precise moment of history."[19] This new way of thinking is not "doctrinal" but rather:

> the permanent reactivation of an attitude - that is, of a philosophical ethos that could be described as a permanent critique of our historical era. (WE,42)

This attitude is for Foucault a defining characteristic of modernity. Modernity for him is not to be "situated on a calendar" preceded by a naive premodernity and followed by a troubling postmodernity. It is an attitude of critique that does not "search for formal structures with universal value," but is "a historical investigation into events that have led us to constitute ourselves and to recognize ourselves as subjects of what we are doing, thinking, saying." (WE,46)

To acknowledge this tradition and one's position within it in this late reflection, is quite remarkable in the light of some of the more disparaging criticisms of Foucault as an irrationalist and nihilist. That it should seem so remarkable is the product of two major confusions about Foucault. First, the interpretation of him as abolishing the subject and the concept of man and hence of doing away with any hope for a politics that places human beings at the centre of its discourse. Second, the interpretation of Foucault that sees him as doing away with any notion of liberation because of its appeal to a human essence that embodies the liberated state. That Foucault is open to such an interpretation as an irrationalist and nihilist is certainly no doubt due

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19 Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power", Afterword to BSH,216.

to the ambiguities of his rhetoric. It is not hard to read Foucault's statements in OT as apocalyptic:

> Rather than the death of God - or, rather, in the wake of that death and in profound correlation with it - what Nietzsche's thought heralds is the end of his murderer; it is the explosion of man's face in laughter, and the return of masks (OT,385)

However, no one should seriously accuse Foucault of dismissing the problem of the subject and the political implications of such a concept. The "dispersion of man" that Foucault so optimistically heralds in OT is a specific experience and strategy that Nietzsche inaugurated in order to awaken one from the "Anthropological Sleep" that Kant initiated before him by positing 'man' as the foundation of thought. Man is not to be the simple and unproblematic centre of thinking and discourse for "man is a recent invention, a figure not yet two centuries old." (OT,xxii) and destined to disappear as soon as knowledge takes a new form. The objection that this knowledge forms at the point of the subject is precisely why Foucault wishes to ask the question who is speaking and to what ends and difference? The subject is not to be taken as the privileged origin of discourse:

> We should suspend the typical questions: how does a free subject penetrate the density of things and endow them with meaning; how does it accomplish its design by animating the rules of discourse from within? Rather, we should ask: under what conditions and through what forms can an entity like the subject appear in the order of discourse; what position does it occupy; what function does it exhibit; and what rules does it follow in each type of discourse? (LCP,137-8)

It is important to realize that a critique of the subject as the transcendental origin of meaning does not mean an anti-humanism that reduces human beings to cogs in an objective world process. Such an

implication would mean that one had not escaped the binary metaphysics that made the subject the privileged centre of things in the first place. Rather, the task as Foucault came to see it, was an historical investigation "of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects."[20] What is interesting is that later on in this essay Foucault uses the concept of liberation in a fairly traditional way:

> The conclusion would be that the political, ethical, social, philosophical problem of our days is not to try to liberate the individual from the state's institutions, but to liberate us both from the state and from the type of individualization which is linked to the state. We have to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries.[21]

Once again we have the mention of "new forms of subjectivity" which echoes the "different economy of bodies and pleasures" of HS,1. We are cautiously told by Foucault that:

> Maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are, but to refuse what we are. We have to imagine and to build up what we could be to get rid of this kind of political 'double bind,' which is the simultaneous individualization and totalization of modern power structures.[22]

Refusing what we are is bound up with an imagining of what we could be; it is in other words determinate rather than abstract, even if these determinations are themselves imagined narratives. And yet Foucault offers us little detail about these new ways of being. It would seem that Foucault is himself in a double bind here. The concept of critique is bound up with a refusal; for Foucault a refusal of what we are now, and yet this refusal has to be in the name of something else otherwise it

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20 Ibid. p. 208.
21 Ibid. p. 216
22 Ibid.

loses all meaning as a refusal. One cannot simply negate everything; cannot refuse the present without a future or past with which to define this refusal. For Foucault, quite clearly it is the promise of the future rather than the nostalgia of the past that animates the attitude of critique. His is a philosophical ethos based upon the possibilities of the future and yet shorn of any *telos* of progress, of any hope that one can discern in the present the potential for improvement in the future. In one sense this can be adjudged to be the product of a fiercely anti-utopian position born of a equally fierce mistrust of traditional narratives of liberation and domination. In another sense it can hardly be more utopian in its ascetic refusal of the possibilities pregnant within the present. Might we not also say that it is a specific cultural response that values the ethic of a constant disengagement from narrative imagination and that itself implies a tacit narrative about existence. With Nietzsche one should ask here: "What then is the meaning of ascetic ideals?"[23]

To take an example from Discipline and Punish, Foucault argues that the "dream of a perfect society" was not just the province of the philosophers and the jurists but was also a "military dream of society". (DP,205) Such a dream we are presumably led to believe has gained a substantial reality in the "carceral society" of the modern West. We are also presumably supposed to be critical of this danger not least because it has been an essential element of the twin excesses of Stalinism and fascism. If we are to be critical of this objectification and disciplining of human beings it is certainly not in the name of the rights of individual subjects. For these are precisely effects of discipline in the first place: "Discipline 'makes' individuals; it is the specific technique of a power

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23 F. Nietzsche, The Genealogy of Morals, p. 102.

that regards individuals both as objects and instruments of its exercise." (DP,170) Foucault is of course typically silent about an alternative to the West's great rationalizing, bureaucratizing and objectivizing structures. Presumably a dismantling of such structures might be in order but not in a systematic way! Curiously he does give a brief indication as to why the structure of the Panopticon is limiting in relation to a positive possibility when he says of the prisoner:

> He is seen, but he does not see; he is the object of information, never a subject in communication. (DP,200)

One might reasonably ask who this "subject in communication" could be except a further extension of the disciplinary matrix. Indeed this is precisely what Foucault argues in The History of Sexuality, when he contends that the practice of subjects in communication oriented to self-understanding and liberation of the true self contains a power matrix that is oppressive precisely because of its unintended and unacknowledged effects.

Another hypothesis Foucault puts forward in DP is that the human sciences are born out of the disciplinary techniques of surveillance, normalization and examination that began to flourish in the eighteenth century. This of itself is a reasonable hypothesis; it certainly would not be disputed by many practitioners of the human sciences. What is disputable, and especially for such practitioners, is Foucault's argument that because these origins are "'ignoble' archives, where the modern play of coercion over bodies, gestures and behaviour has its beginnings", (DP,191) then by extension the consequent development of the human sciences is irredeemably tainted with this ignobility and placed into question. It is important to recognise that this is not the

familiar argument that the status of the human sciences is questionable because they have not yet, nor ever will reach scientific status (on the contrary it is the very establishment of a form of scientificity in such disciplines that is of concern for Foucault). Rather, it is the genealogical argument that places a practice of the present into question because of its "ignoble" and lowly origins.

Foucault sees genealogies not just as historical investigations but as strategic interventions in current struggles (PK,64,83). However, as Cousins and Hussain point out, such a genealogy can not aspire to a general critique and it can perform critical functions only under definite conditions. Its effects are limited because it is but one particular strategy of critique.[24] The ignoble origins of the human sciences may be revealed but for that to mean something now, ignobility has to function as a critical value which is connected with an epistemological value. Foucauldian genealogy may have no systematic epistemology but it relies crucially on functioning as an epistemological tribunal to succeed as a critical enterprise. Cousins and Hussain thus argue that a normative assessment of branches of knowledge cannot be displaced so easily. No genealogy of the human sciences can displace or stand in for a direct assessment of present theories of the human sciences. If it does, then the genealogist is performing exactly the same function as epistemologists have done. One might ask why, if genealogy shows that the origin and subsequent use of a phenomena are wide apart, then can this not apply to the human sciences in terms of their use now being beneficial?

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24 M. Cousins and A. Hussain, Michel Foucault, p. 264.

(iii) Dispersion as an Ascetic Utopia

This problem of genealogy's critical judgement is quite clearly connected with the refusal of the active refiguration of the world. When Nietzsche practiced genealogy by tracing the origins of the values of good and evil, good and bad, and the notions of guilt and bad conscience; the "reward" of this "long, brave, industrious and subterranean seriousness" was the "cheerfulness" of "*gay science*". What is explicit in Nietzsche's 'polemic' is the critique of moral values; the questioning of the value of present values. For this "a knowledge of the conditions and circumstances in which they grew, under which they evolved and changed"[25] is required but this knowledge is subordinate to the reevaluation of all values. Genealogy reveals the base foundations of present glories but this baseness is so defined in relation to another value scheme. This is the goal of:

> a *different* kind of spirit from that likely to appear in this present age: spirits strengthened by war and victory, for whom conquest, adventure, danger, and even pain have become needs.[26]

Nietzsche is explicit about the value of genealogy for the promotion of "the *redeeming* man of great love and contempt", the "man of the future". All the same, he hardly produces a detailed account of the *Übermensch*; that is a task for those younger and "'heavier with future' and stronger" than Nietzsche, but it is clear that without such a vision Nietzsche regards his own diagnosis of the nihilism of the present as worthless.

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25 F. Nietzsche, The Genealogy of Morals, p. 20.
26 Ibid. p. 96.

To justify the description of Foucault's refusal to produce alternatives to the present as ascetic and hence utopian one only has to read Nietzsche's third essay in The Genealogy of Morals. Nietzsche suspects that "when a philosopher pays homage to the ascetic ideal" it is a first "indication" that "he wants *to gain release from a torture.*"[27] Nietzsche is speaking broadly of philosophers who are "world-denying, hostile to life, suspicious of the senses"[28] and value asceticism for its release from physicality, multiplicity, and pain. Foucault's thought is steeped in an articulation of physicality, multiplicity, and pain and yet on another level one can interpret his refusal to engage in positive valuations as a desire to escape the 'torture' of values, of positive political choice.

One immediately thinks of another intellectual who struggled with the problem of values in social science: Max Weber.[29] Weber's celebrated attempt to create a value-free social science allows that the knowledge therein produced may only help to find the best means to achieve certain aims.[30] It is logically impossible for an empirical discipline to establish, scientifically, ideals which define what 'ought to be'. This is the basic premise of neo-Kantian epistemology which Weber adheres to throughout his work. The social scientist should not promote her own values in her work and there is a radical division between the production of impartial social science and one's own personal world-view. Foucault of course would dispute the possibility of value-free knowledge let alone social science. Weber's realm of values which is a source of

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27 Ibid. p. 106.
28 Ibid. p. 116.
29 Max Weber, Methodology of the Social Sciences, tr. and Ed. E. Shils and H. Finch (New York: Free Press, 1949). The similarities between Weber's and Foucault's interpretations of modernity are obvious, see S. K. White, Political Theory and Postmodernism, p. 120.
30 Methodology of the Social Sciences, p. 5.

irreconcilable antagonism and conflict in the world, is for Foucault, to be extended to all discourse. However, the conclusions that Weber draws from this value conflict can throw light upon Foucault's own attitude to intellectual practice.

Far from drawing the conclusion that politics was simply irrational, Weber argued that a responsible, vocational political ethics can be achieved through a moral commitment that is disciplined by a rational assessment of the realistic possibilities of gaining one's ideals.[31] This belief mirrors a similar belief in the possibility of vocational commitment in the face of the increasing rationalization of life. This notion of a vocation recalls the religious notion of a calling and it allows similar experiences of passion and the striving for perfection that are to be found in a religious calling, albeit in a thoroughly secular way. As Jeffrey Alexander points out: "To practise a vocation as the Puritans did means to be disciplined by a moral spirit that facilitates the realization of the self."[32]

This interpretation uncannily echoes Foucault's remarks in HS,2 about the purpose of philosophical activity:

> After all, what would be the value of the passion for knowledge if it resulted only in a certain amount of knowledgeableness and not, in one way or another and to the extent possible, in the knower's straying afield of himself?... The "essay" - which should be understood as the assay or test by which, in the game of truth, one undergoes changes, and not as the simplistic appropriation of others for the purpose of communication - is the living substance of philosophy, at least if we assume that philosophy is still

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31 Max Weber, From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology, tr. and ed. by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, (London: Routledge, 1948), p. 120

32 Jeffrey Alexander, "The Dialectic of Individuation and Domination: Weber's Rationalization Theory and Beyond", in Max Weber: Rationality and Modernity, ed. S. Whimster and S. Lash, (London: Allen and Unwin, 1987), p. 200.

> what it was in times past, ie., an "ascesis," *askesis*, an exercise of oneself in the activity of thought. (HS,2,8-9)

There are obvious differences here, however. Weber distinguishes between the sphere of the public and that of the private, and does not believe that the two should encroach upon the other's entirely different value spheres.[33] The personal and private sphere of the aesthetic and erotic should not enter the sphere of science or economics. His whole work can be seen as an attempt to understand how one can orientate oneself in the modern world given the tremendous development of rationalization and the disenchantment of the world through the extension of the scientific perspective. In this respect he proposed an ethic of personal responsibility that is embedded within the philosophy of the subject. It is the subject who chooses how to respond to the modern world but independent of how the world is:

> We cannot read off the meaning of the world from our investigation of it however perfect, rather we have to create this meaning ourselves.[34]

For Weber the human universe is characterised by the existence of irreducibly competing ideals. Since there is no single ideal or set of ideals which can be shown by scientific analysis to be right or wrong, there can be no universal ethics:

> The fate of an epoch which has eaten of the tree of knowledge is that it must know that we cannot learn the meaning of the world from the results of its analysis, be it ever so perfect; it must rather be in a position to create this meaning itself. It must recognise that general views of life and the universe can never be the products of increasing empirical knowledge, and that the highest ideals, which move us most forcefully, are always formed only in

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[33] Echoing Kant's distinction in "What is Enlightenment?" between the public and private use of reason.

[34] Methodology of the Social Sciences, p. 56.

> the struggle with other ideals which are just as sacred to others as ours are to us.[35]

This distinction between different value spheres is something that Foucault obviously does not believe is possible in reality. Indeed it is precisely the "will to knowledge" that has to be investigated and questioned for the effects it has produced in the West over the last two thousand years. Whereas, for Weber, the status of empirical cognitive explanation is fairly secure; for Foucault, its entwinement with practices of exclusion, marginalisation, objectification and subjectification signal its dethronement as the undisputed intellectual response to the world. In an 1983 interview Foucault reveals just how close and yet also how far he is from Weber's notion of the intellectual practice as a calling in the form of a vocation:

> But if I refer to my own personal experience I have the feeling knowledge can't do anything for us and that political power may destroy us... All this is related not to what I think theoretically (I know that's wrong) but I speak from personal experience.... I am not interested in the academic status of what I am doing because my problem is my own transformation... This transformation of one's self by one's own knowledge is, I think, something rather close to the aesthetic experience. (PPC,14)

In terms of the value of knowledge, scholarship, and theory for the benefit of the self, Foucault could not be more emphatic. The relationship between thought and the self is as passionate here as it is in Weber's vocational commitment, but there is a major difference. For Foucault, such a relationship is justified in aesthetic terms; it is in the service of the broader task of creating one's self through an aesthetics of existence; a case of giving style to one's life and making it beautiful.

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35 Ibid. p. 57.

One is reminded of Nietzsche's famous doctrine that "it is only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* that existence and the world are eternally *justified.*"[36] For Nietzsche this is an acceptance of man's irredeemable judging activity that remains even after the "death of God". Foucault's notion differs sharply from Nietzsche's sweeping revaluation of all values and artistic creation of the world in the way it seems to focus upon the intensely private life of the individual. There seems to be no attempt to connect this aestheticism of one's existence to the public inter-subjective world. It is in this apparent privatisation of the ethical that Foucault's position appears at its weakest and seems to justify criticisms of it as neo-conservative.

In what ways can Foucault's correlation of intellectual practice and self-transformation be linked to the wider area of politics? Are we to think of this correlation as a source of new political practices that focus upon the personal as the preeminent sphere for radical change? If so, what is the status of the personal in this model; what are the conditions of subjectivity that Foucault invokes when he calls for the aesthetics of the self? Are we to take his thought as indicating a utopian relation to present constitutions of subjectivity; one which, borrowing from his genealogies of the subject, breaks radically with existing sources of political motivation such as human rights or the dignity and satisfaction of subjects? Or can one incorporate this notion of self-transformation into existing models of revolutionary political transformation? For example, does it provide an instance of how the critical theory of a society can be internalized and used by individuals to further their

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36 F. Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy, tr. W. Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), p. 52. See also R. Schroeder "Nietzsche and Weber: Two Prophets of the Modern World", in Max Weber: Rationality and Modernity.

emancipation along the lines of a creative practice of existence? One criticism of critical theory has been its tendency towards abstraction and its subsequent inability to foster social change.[37] Perhaps Foucault's linkage of critical practice to an aesthetics of existence provides the connections lacking in such abstractions. That critical theories of society are interpretations of an already pre-interpreted world means that such interpretations have to be accepted by individuals in order to provide frameworks for action and change. If one accepts that this "double hermeneutic"[38] is a crucial element of any interpretation of society and once one sees the importance of connecting such interpretations to the self-interpretations of individuals then perhaps Foucault's notion of an aesthetics of existence can be seen in a more positive light. Whether such a notion is not too utopian and romantic in its emphasis upon human expression is a separate question. I want to suggest, following Ricoeur, that the normative content of any theory that proposes such change will necessarily have an element that can be designated utopian in the sense of its distantiation from that which is in existence. This applies as much to a genealogy at the limits as it does to a critical theory of society and it is for this reason that genealogy as a ceaseless transgression is suspect to the charge of utopianism.

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[37] See for eg. T. McCarthy, "Complexity and Democracy, or the Seducements of Systems Theory" and Dieter Misgeld, "Critical Hermeneutics versus Neo-Parsonianism" who argues that the theory of communicative action hovers over the heads of acting and communicating citizens and for it to be practically enlightening they need to translate it into the situated contexts of their practically organized lives. Both in New German Critique, Spring/Summer 1985. Similarly John B. Thompson argues: "How the results of a therapeutic dialogue enter into the practical deliberations of a subject population is nowhere specified in any detail, and hence the way in which theoretical statements provide a basis for political strategies remains unclear." Critical Hermeneutics: A Study in the Thought of Paul Ricoeur and Jürgen Habermas, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 173.

[38] See A. Giddens, Social Theory and Modern Sociology (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987), pp. 18-21.

For Foucault, it is the emphasis upon the search for truth and grounding of value that prevents the formulation of questions about the formation of social practices intimately bound up with such preoccupations in the first place. One particular epistemological concept of critique that he is sceptical of is that of ideology. In an interview he sketches three reasons why the concept of ideology is problematic:

> The first is that, like it or not, it always stands in virtual opposition to something else which is supposed to count as truth. Now I believe that the problem does not consist in drawing the line between that in a discourse which falls under the category of scientificity or truth, and that which comes under some other category, but in seeing historically how effects of truth are produced within discourses which in themselves are neither true nor false. The second drawback is that the concept of ideology refers, I think necessarily, to something of the order of a subject. Thirdly, ideology stands in a secondary position relative to something which functions as its infrastructure, as its material, economic determinant, etc. For these three reasons, I think that this is a notion that cannot be used without circumspection. (PK,118)

This scepticism about the notion of ideology illuminates Foucault's distrust of normative foundations for critique. Traditionally a concept of ideology implies a negative evaluation of it in relation to a correct or 'true' analysis of conditions. One of the most important problems in theories of ideology is the fact that they give rise to intractable problems of justification. If ideology is an evaluative term; if its very use conveys a critical note and calls for a process of critique, then how can some discourse, as opposed to others be characterized as ideological? How can one stand outside of social life and assess the discourse of others, when that interpretation is but another interpretation.

One solution to this intractable problem is the distinction between science and ideology which places critical discourse on the side of science and the 'truth'. This is in some sense the answer proposed by Althusser in his theorisation of Marxism as a science of history and it is this distinction between science and ideology that Foucault finds so problematic.

Althusser attempted to formulate Marxism as a science of history by claiming that Marx's theoretical revolution of social analysis bore the same epistemological features as traditional scientific revolutions. This was achieved by importing Bachelard's historical epistemology into the field of social theory in order to draw a distinction between Marxist science and pre-scientific understandings of the social world. Scientific knowledge in this respect, always constitutes itself through a break with ordinary experience on to another conceptual plane and such knowledge can never be satisfactorily translated back into ordinary experience.

Thus, Marx's later writing becomes the paradigm of science, in the sense that it breaks completely with ordinary understanding of the world and ideology becomes a relation to this scientific understanding. This is not in the sense of empirical, but in the sense of fundamental knowledge which provides the framework for a correct understanding of society. For orthodox Marxism the real basis of history for understanding history is the forces and relations of production and not the determination of individuals in determinate conditions. Ideology is thus defined against whatever Marxism identifies as the real basis of history and the object of Marxist science becomes the correct knowledge of the real basis, ie. the forces and relations of production.

Althusser is the most radical proponent of a form of this orthodox Marxism. The theoretical structure of Marxism is emphasized at the expense of versions of it as a philosophy of praxis or as a specific historical political movement. This constitution of a scientific Marxism necessarily has to eliminate references to "real individuals" as the essence and end of history because the point of view of the individual is not a structural, that is, scientific point of view. Althusser argues in For Marx:

> Strictly in respect to theory, therefore, one can and must speak openly of Marx's theoretical anti-humanism and see in this theoretical anti-humanism the absolute (negative) precondition of the (positive) knowledge of the human world itself, and of its practical transformation. It is impossible to know anything about men except on the absolute precondition that the philosophical (theoretical) myth of man is reduced to ashes.[39]

In defence of this theory he attempts to provide a more sophisticated interpretation of the relation between infrastructure and superstructure; one that would seek to answer criticisms such as Foucault's, that the superstructure is always in a secondary position in such models of society.

Althusser's attempt at purifying Marxism from its degenerate versions as a political creed stem from his belief that it should be the "theoretical domain of a fundamental investigation, indispensable not only to the development of the science of society and of the various 'human sciences,' but also to that of the natural sciences and philosophy."[40] Ironically, Althusser's position can be seen to arise preeminently from the specific historical conditions that made the task of preserving the

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39 For Marx, p. 229-30.
40 Louis Althusser, For Marx, tr. B. Brewster (London Verso, 1969), p. 26.

theoretical structure of Marxism seem imperative if it was not to fall prey to all kinds of positivist philosophies and opportunist distortions.[41]

Subsequent criticisms of Althusser's assumption that Marxism was or should be a science necessarily question this notion of a scientific history of Marxism. Robert Young points out that the difficulties in which Althusser subsequently became involved were a result of his ignoring Canguilhem's warning that although the history of science takes science for its object, it is not itself a science, and therefore cannot claim to be value-free, ie. non-ideological.[42] Gregory Elliot points out that Althusser allied Marxism with non-Marxist philosophy whilst claiming to be a strict adherent of Marxist science. Elliot quotes Martin Jay and calls Althusser "the most promiscuous (of Western Marxists) in allowing non-Marxist influences to affect his ideas" and wonders whether Althusser escaped the 'German Ideology' only to be bewitched by the French.[43]

It is clear where Foucault stands in relation to this problematic. It is not the possibility of constructing a science of human being that is of concern (indeed such a possibility already exists in the objectivisations of various human sciences) but the very fact that Marxism constitutes one such form of *savoir* that is his objection to it:

> But to all these demands of: 'Is it or is it not a science?', the genealogies or the genealogists would reply: 'If you really want to know, the fault lies in your very

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41 See Gregory Elliott, Althusser: The Detour of Theory (London: Verso, 1987) "The Moment of Althusser".
42 See Robert Young, White Mythologies: Writing History and the West, p. 49.
43 Althusser: The Detour of Theory, p. 67. A good account of the history of structural Marxism and the influence of Althusser can be found in Ted Benton, The Rise and Fall of Structural Marxism, (London: Macmillan, 1984).

> determination to make a science out of Marxism or psychoanalysis or this or that study'. If we have any objection against Marxism, it lies in the fact that it could effectively be a science.(PK,169)

This criticism is based on a questioning of the desire to aspire to the kind of power that is presumed to accompany the possession of such a science. It is also apparently aimed at the idea of a theoretical avant-garde who legitimate certain practices, rules of construction and concepts at the same time as disqualifying other types of knowledge. Althusser's distinction between scientific Marxism and ideological thought is one obvious target in this questioning. Indeed, Foucault argues in OT that Marx was a figure firmly embedded in the nineteenth century and that far from initiating a radical break in the theories of social, economic and political analysis was a man of his time. Even more provocatively for Althusserian Marxists, Foucault suggests that it was Ricardo that initiated the break in economic theory that Marx was an heir to, by conceiving of value as a product of labour rather than a sign of exchange. [44]

Foucault argues that:

> At the deepest level of Western knowledge, Marxism introduced no real discontinuity;... Though it is in opposition to the 'bourgeois' theories of economics, and though this opposition leads it to use the project of a radical reversal of History as a weapon against them, that conflict and that project nevertheless have as their condition of possibility, not the reworking of all History, but an event that any archaeology can situate with precision, and that prescribed simultaneously, and according to the same mode, both nineteenth- century bourgeois economics and nineteenth-century revolutionary economics. (OT,262)

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[44] See OT,254.

Foucault relates this new arrangement of knowledge constituted in the form of "a series, of sequential connection, and of development" to the revival of "utopias of ultimate development" (OT,262):

> The great dream of an end to History is the utopia of causal systems of thought, just as the dream of the world's beginnings was the utopia of the classifying systems of thought. (OT,263)

Marxism's dialectical promise is merely one example of such utopias and when it is legitimated by an appeal to scientific truth is doubly dangerous. The role of such scientific arbitration is one that Foucault refuses to adopt. It was Nietzsche who according to Foucault "burned for us... the intermingled promises of the dialectic and anthropology." (OT,263) and it is since Nietzsche that the question of truth has been transformed from "What is the surest path to Truth?" to "What is the hazardous career that Truth has followed?" (PK,66) In this respect, Althusser's intervention in Marxist theory, although motivated by many specific historical and political events can be seen as one more example of this career of "Truth" in Western civilization. Foucault's questions are posed in relation to this career:

> Science, the constraint to truth, the obligation of truth and ritualised procedures for its production have traversed absolutely the whole of Western society for millenia and are now so universalised as to become the general law for all civilisations. What is the history of this 'will to truth'? What are its effects? How is all this interwoven with relations of power? (PK,66)

Instead of thinking of political problems in terms of science and ideology, Foucault argues that they should be thought of in terms of 'truth' and 'power'. In this schema the task is not to change people's consciousness but of "ascertaining the possibility of constituting a new

politics of truth". (PK,133) It is necessary to question the very aspirations we may have when we desire the kind of power that is presumed to accompany scientific discourse. The demand 'Is it a science?' automatically entails a disqualification of other types of knowledge. More especially, the claim that one is conducting a scientific discourse often means that one is attempting to legitimate a particular political avant-garde. This is certainly the case with Althusser's theoretical intervention. The attempt to establish the scientificity of Marxism is for Foucault an attempt to invest it with the effects of power attributed to science and the central effect in most cases is the establishing of the one 'true' interpretation of society and the one 'true' course of action to be taken in the light of this interpretation.

Foucault is hardly alone in his scepticism about this project for a science of society. Critical theorists of society have stressed the irreducibly interpretive nature of theory and critique also.[45] However, where he differs from such thinkers is in his response to this interpretive element. Far from seeing it as a situation that calls for meta-reflection about the conditions and limits of interpretive understanding in order to ascertain the possibilities for the formation of quasi-transcendental or regulative ideals of critical reason, he regards it as a situation that warrants the Nietzschean hypothesis of interpretive force. Here meaning, as we have seen, results from the successful imposition of an interpretation. It is this notion of success or victory that we shall see destabilises Foucault's own emphasis upon the subjugated as a critical principle.

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45 See, for example, "Hermeneutics and Social Theory" in A. Giddens, Profiles and Critiques in Social Theory (London: Macmillan, 1982), for a sketch of the demise of the positivistic consensus about social theory.

The admission of partial interests for a universalist such as Habermas is inexcusable. For him, such a declaration vitiates any claims that Foucault seeks to make about the nature of the present or the past. It is difficult to see why this is the case, however. That is, unless Habermas is working with a strong notion of the 'truth' in which truth claims are warranted only if they are ahistorical. All that can be said of Foucault's work is that it is specific and local, which does not exclude truth understood as a use value and indeed maybe is conducive to the production of truth claims that are pertinent to the present. Habermas' fear is that unless there is an appeal to the universal then a critique cannot claim validity for all and thus cannot claim validity. Why a critique cannot be in the service of a part of society, or a particular historical group at a particular time is not addressed by Habermas' totalising of social critique. The only other way in which Foucault can avoid this charge of partiality (and by extension falsity on Habermas' strong model of truth), is by arguing that he is not engaged in evaluation but rather in practising a pure historiography stripped off any relation other than describing.[46] This of course is not only impossible but something Foucault actively renounces:

> Historians take unusual pains to erase the elements in their work which reveal their grounding in a particular time and place, their preferences in a controversy - the unavoidable obstacles of their passion. Nietzsche's version of historical sense is explicit in its perspective and acknowledges its system of injustice. Its perspective is slanted, being a deliberate appraisal, affirmation, or negation; it reaches the lingering and poisonous traces in order to prescribe the best antidote. (NGH,90)

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46 This is something Habermas thinks is Foucault's real intention when he quotes Paul Veyne, who describes Foucault as the "historian in a pure state." See PDM,275.

(iv) Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault: Three Physicians of Culture

What is absent in Foucault's project is precisely what he ascribes to Nietzsche: "the best antidote" to the present's problems and dangers. Nietzsche is precisely the thinker who evaluates, appraises, affirms and negates and it is curious why, even with such an explicit acknowledgement of this crucial aspect of Nietzsche's thinking, Foucault refuses himself to do the same. Might we not say that it is here that he imitates the paralysis of the present?[47]

For Nietzsche, the history of philosophy is a history of *réssentiment*; a history of ideas that are fundamentally life-negating. The *Übermensch* is free from revenge because he cannot show pity or slander the earth, both of which breed revenge. The *Übermensch* embodies an active redemption in that he unifies time through the will which is the liberator and bringer of joy: "To redeem the past and to transform every 'It was' into and 'I wanted it thus!' that alone do I call redemption."[48] The "It was" causes teeth gnashing and lonely affliction for the will is powerless in the face of it. Redemption cannot overcome the past by willing backwards for this is impossible; the will is imprisoned to only will forward. All revenge arises precisely out of this inability of the will to will backwards in time: "This, yes, this alone, is revenge itself: the will's antipathy toward time and time's 'It was'."[49] Zarathustra teaches that the will is a creator and to create is the opposite of revenge. Creation is redemption from time precisely because

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47 See Ricoeur, Ideology and Utopia, p. 313.
48 F. Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, tr. R. J. Hollingdale, (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1961), p. 161.
49 Ibid. p. 151.

the will says "I willed it thus". To create for Nietzsche is to be *reconciled* with time.

The ultimate expression of this will to create indeed the highest possible formula for the forward looking will free from *réssentiment* is the will to the eternal recurrence of the same. This courage destroys giddiness at the abysses that temporal being produces: "Courage, however, is the best destroyer, courage that attacks: it destroys even death, for it says: 'Was that life? Well then! Once again!'"[50]

Nietzsche's project is thus, irredeemably axiological. Heidegger recognizes the importance of this totalisation of self-assertion for Nietzsche and concludes that the doctrine of the will to power is the keystone of his thought and that this inheritance from traditional Western thought bounds him to the past he is seeking to overcome. In his Nietzsche lectures, Heidegger shows how all of Nietzsche's doctrines even down to the eternal recurrence depend upon the will to power. [51] The doctrine is a break from substance metaphysics but is similarly trapped in metaphysics because it is merely a inversion of its ultimate foundations and hence Nietzsche is the consummate nihilist in which the will to power is the ultimate reality, transforming the negative Schopenhaurian model of the will into a creative and yea-saying positivity. For Heidegger, this is ultimately meaningless and leads to a deeper enslavement in nihilism. Being for Nietzsche, the will to power, is nothing but will to will; a will that wills its own perpetuation.

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50 Ibid. p. 178.
51 M. Heidegger, Nietzsche, (4 vols) tr. by J. Stamburgh, D. F. Krell, and F. A. Capuzzi (New York: Harper and Row, 1979, 1982, 1984, 1987).

For Heidegger, Nietzsche's will to will is no mere curiosity in the history of ideas because the epochs of metaphysics are the epochs of world history.[52] Pure will is embodied in contemporary technological world disclosure in which nature becomes a relationship of forces which can be represented as a system, a calculable energy supply. This energy supply is for a rapacious subject and this scientific-technological world disclosure is the 'bad destiny' of Western metaphysics. But other disclosures are possible, and indeed urgent.

Whereas Nietzsche believes that *réssentiment* is overcome by the will to power of the *Übermensch*, Heidegger finds the very essence of nihilism in this will to power. Nietzsche's *Übermensch* still moves in the parameters of representational thinking. For Heidegger, Nietzsche's idea of time is a metaphysical idea, a product of representational thinking. It is basically a succession of discrete 'nows' and belongs to the ordinary conception of time rooted in the will to calculate and count. The *Übermensch* is from Heidegger's viewpoint the last man and Nietzsche is a nihilist despite his best intentions.[53]

For Heidegger the essence of nihilism is thinking in terms of values. He quotes in "The Word Of Nietzsche" what Nietzsche understands by value: "The point of view of 'value' is the point of view constituting the preservation-enhancement conditions with respect to complex forms of relative duration of life within becoming."[54] Value as a kind of seeing is always related to some form of life and ultimately to some form of will.

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52 M. Heidegger, "The Word of Nietzsche: 'God is dead'" in The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays, tr. W. Lovitt (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), p. 107.
53 See M. Heidegger, What is Called Thinking, tr. J. G. Gray (New York, Harper and Row, 1968), p. 104, see also p. 109
54 "The Word of Nietzsche: 'God is dead'", p. 71, see also p. 75.

Values and the will to power are thus correlative. Nietzsche's project of trans-valuation is thus nihilistic precisely because of it being a trans-valuation:

> If, however, value does not let Being be Being, does not let it be what it is as Being itself, then this supposed overcoming is above all the consummation of nihilism. For now metaphysics not only does not think Being itself, but this not-thinking of Being clothes itself in the illusion that it does think Being in the most exalted manner, in that it esteems Being as a value, so that all questions concerning Being become and remain superfluous.[55]

Thinking in terms of values is a "murdering" of Being. It is animated precisely by the spirit of revenge and because of this Nietzsche's overcoming of metaphysics only exacerbates the problem.

In opposition to Nietzsche's attempt, Heidegger argues for a meditative, commemorative thinking as an overcoming of revenge and *réssentiment*.[56] Life is filled with revengeful thinking and to advocate a thinking free from this, one has to transform one's relation to language and abdicate the attempt to will a better life. However, this is not simply to become a bystander to the difficulty of life, for *réssentiment* saturates the perspective of impartiality more than anything else.

Heidegger's response to Nietzsche's replacement of philosophy with a genealogy of morals is typically violent in his characterization of Nietzsche as the last thinker of the West; the culmination of Western onto-theo-logical thinking rather than its overcoming. What is clear, however, is that Nietzsche's own understanding of his relationship to this tradition is one of physician. Nietzsche does not shy away from this

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55 Ibid. p. 104.
56 See M. Heidegger, Discourse on Thinking, tr. J. M. Anderson and E. H. Freund, (New York: Harper and Row, 1966).

role of interpreter of the decadence and nihilism that he argues has beset the West at least since the time of Socrates' introduction of dialectics into Greek society.[57] This critique of nihilism is quite explicitly linked to the philosophy of the future, to the *Übermensch*; it is unashamedly optimistic and vital. This particular Nietzschean characteristic is as J. G. Merquior points out peculiarly lacking in the work of Foucault.[58] It is not that Foucault is simply disinclined to offer judgements on the present but rather that such judgements are made with no consistent valuation or affirmation. Indeed Merquior recognizes that Foucault does pass judgement upon the present but that this judgement is rendered meaningless by his monolithic view of power and totalisation of discipline throughout the whole of society:

> by seeing power everywhere, and by equating (in most of his work) culture with domination... actually greatly reduced the explanatory force of his power concepts.[59]

Without a point from which to conduct his analysis of power, Foucault is once again deemed to have failed in his attempt to radically transform the analysis of politics. That Foucault wished to so radically transform the theory and practice of struggle is perhaps a misconstrual of his own intellectual practice, however. It is hardly correct to say that Foucault was a dark pessimist about man and history, and at the same time argue that he intended to radically transform the analysis of power in order to provide solutions to the classic questions of domination and liberation addressed by previous power analyses. If Foucault is to be a pessimist this should surely extend to that most optimistic linkage of human thought; the pairing of reason with emancipation. At the same time those

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57 F. Nietzsche, The Twilight of the Idols, tr. R. J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), p. 31.
58 J. G. Merquior, Foucault, (London: Fontana, 1985), p. 145.
59 Ibid. p. 156.

who would see Foucault's 'political anatomy' as the "clearest and most fully developed version of a new political theory and practice that is just beginning to emerge from the discrediting of both Marxism and reformism"[60] are equally excessive in their estimation of Foucault's intentions in providing new perspectives upon the elusive concept of power.

Where does this leave Foucault's work? In The Twilight of the Idols, Nietzsche characterises Socratic thought as dialectic which is chosen only in the last resort in the attempt to live the good life. The Socratic administration of dialectics to Greek society is taken to be already a sign of decadence and decline by Nietzsche:

> One chooses dialectics only when one has no other expedient. One knows that dialectics inspire mistrust, that they are not very convincing.[61]

For Nietzsche, the Greek embracing of reason in the form of dialectics indicates the "state of emergency" they found themselves in. One counters the dark desires of the instincts by producing permanent daylight through the use of reason. This is why Socrates appears as a saviour/physician but according to Nietzsche this "*entire morality of improvement... has been a misunderstanding*", "a form of sickness" itself.[62] Socrates purportedly acknowledges this when he says he owes a cock to Asclepius before he dies. For Nietzsche, this is Socrates' admission that life is an illness and vindicates his interpretation of Socratic philosophy as essentially a nihilistic and decadent response to life, in which death alone can act as a physician. By implication,

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60 A. Sheridan, Michel Foucault: The Will to Truth, (London: Tavistock, 1980), pp. 221-2.
61 F. Nietzsche, The Twilight of the Idols, p. 31.
62 Ibid. p. 34.

Nietzsche is arguing that one cannot be a physician if one is sick; one cannot attend to the dangers of life if one is already a part of the danger. Once again it is only a healthy will to power that can perform the reevaluation of all values and diagnose the ills of culture.

Nietzsche's characterisation of dialectic as both a symptom of and unconvincing response to an already weak and insecure culture can be reevaluated, however. Indeed the production of 'mistrust' and uncertainty, that is for Nietzsche a weak response to an already uncertain situation, can be interpreted as a response that does not shirk the difficulties of existence. This is a fairly standard interpretation of Socratic dialectic; one that Gadamer endorses for instance in his linking of the finite language-bound questioning of Greek philosophy with his own philosophical hermeneutics.[63] This reading of the Socratic response to a society and culture seeking foundations for itself is one that focuses not on the answers supposedly given in the Platonic appropriation of Socrates but on the finite, uncertain, and dangerous process of dialectical questioning.[64] It is this participation in the suffering of language which is paramount, not the attempt to bring such a process to a stop through the distiling of transcendent, ahistorical principles of beauty, truth and the good.

For Nietzsche, this attitude cannot but be a nihilistic one; Western civilization since the explicit Greek turning from the instincts is everywhere in decline and dialectics only exacerbates this decline.

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63 See H. G. Gadamer, Reason in the Age of Science, tr. F. G. Lawrence, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1981), and P. Christopher Smith, "H. G. Gadamer's Heideggerian Interpretation of Plato" in Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology, Vol. 12, No. 3, Oct. 1981.

64 See Heidegger's interpretation of Socrates in What is Called Thinking, p. 17.

Ultimately the problem for Nietzsche is culture itself. Insofar as man is a cultural being he is sick: "man is, relatively speaking, the most unsuccessful animal, the sickliest, the one most dangerously strayed from its instincts."[65] Man is a violent alienation from his animal instincts; he is a degenerate being precisely because he is cultural. This is why Nietzsche speculates that man is a transition, a bridge to something else and this is why he is a diagnostician operating in terms of the future.

As we have seen in chapter three, Nietzsche singles out the capacity for memory in order to distinguish man from animal life and which carries with it potentially ruinous rewards. The end-point of Socratic dialectics is the nihilism of the present in which 'truth' is dissolved by the will to truth and man is left radically homesick by the "death of God". This interpretation of modernity is a subversion of modern historical consciousness first brought to light systematically by Hegel. Modernity is here the "glorious sunrise" which "has to recapitulate the break brought about with the past as a *continuous renewal.*" (PDM,7) This is a phenomena characterised by Habermas as being no longer able to "borrow the criteria by which it takes its orientation from the models supplied by another epoch; *it has to create its normativity out of itself.*" (PDM,7)

On Habermas's reading, the absence of an ontological unity to the world and the concurrent fragmentation of social life expanded and deepened in the last three hundred years in the West, is something that cannot be overcome or renounced. Rather the mature response to this plural

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65 F. Nietzsche, The Anti-Christ, tr. R. J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), p. 124.

universe is the subjection of everything to critique, even reason itself for it is only in this way that the normative is created out of itself. Hegel's own particular response to this situation is seen as a powerful and seductive grounding of modernity out of the principles of subjectivity and absolute knowledge that could not fail to elicit dissatisfaction in his successors because of its dissolving of modernity's predicament into the rationality of the real. Hegel's totalized mediation appears to be a grand gesture but ultimately is an over-inflation of the concept of reason that forgets its own starting point in the finitude of the present. Post-Hegelian philosophy responds to this in various ways. The most prominent nineteenth century inheritor of Hegel's attempt to reunite a divided world is of course Marx, for whom:

> Communism is the *positive* supersession of *private property* as *human self-estrangement*, and hence the true *appropriation* of the human essence through and for man; it is the complete restoration of man to himself as a *social*, i.e. human, being, a restoration which has become conscious and which takes place within the entire wealth of previous periods of development. This communism, as fully developed naturalism, equals humanism, and as fully developed humanism equals naturalism; it is the *genuine* resolution of the conflict between man and nature, and between man and man, the true resolution of the conflict between existence and being, between objectification and self-affirmation, between freedom and necessity, between individual and species. It is the solution of the riddle of history and knows itself to be the solution.[66]

Such a confident prognosis of the solution to the human condition in Marx's early work is never renounced even with the turn to a scientific analysis of Capital. Indeed such a turn is designed to cement revolutionary self-confidence rather than blunt it through an account of the structural limitations on human praxis. Yet Marx's hopes for a

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66 K. Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts", in Early Writings, tr. by R. Livingstone and G. Benton (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), p. 348.

communist society, (no doubt to some extent because of the influence of Hegel) appear no less a hyper-inflation of man's capacity to establish a realm of freedom through the use of his powers of reason and agency. The disastrous attempts to establish communism in the twentieth century are certainly enlisted in the service of such a judgement. As Habermas points out however, the central components of this judgement do not take into account that for most critical theories of society: "*revolutionary self-confidence and theoretical self-certainty are gone*"; both because of the "incalculability of interventions into deep-seated structures of highly complex societies" with which there is a concomitant "risk of catastrophic alternatives", and because of the entry of Marxism "into the academy" where it has to submit itself to the prevalent "fallibilistic consciousness on the side of theory."[67] Such a guarded response to the capacities and hopes of a critical theory of society in the Marxist tradition does not go far enough for Lyotard who suspects that there still lurks a metanarrative of legitimation in the form of a ideal discursive consensus behind Habermas's claims.[68] That such a consensus might be totalizing and conformist is for Lyotard only part of the problem. The fact that it is based upon a blindness to the heterogeneity of language games and "the absence of a universal genre of discourse to regulate them"[69] means a blindness to the problem of politics itself.

(v) Refigurations of Culture: Utopia as Positive Disruption

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67 J. Habermas, "A Reply to my Critics" in Habermas: Critical Debates, ed. J. B. Thompson and D. Held (London: Macmillan, 1982), p. 222.
68 J. F. Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, tr. G. Bennington and B. Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 60.
69 J. F. Lyotard, The Differend: Phrases in Dispute, tr. G. Van Den Abbeele (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), p. xii.

The absence of a common criterion of validity from which to judge competing claims is a situation that Karl Mannheim starts from in his formulation of a sociology of knowledge[70] Anticipating Lyotard, Mannheim argues that it is not so much that there are conflicting interests in the world but that rather there is an absence of a universal grid of interpretation for ascertaining a common reality. The demise of an ontological unity to the world highlights the fact that every perspective on reality is relative to a specific social origin and that this has been obscured only by hitherto relatively unitary and stable social formations.[71] In the modern situation of a fragmentary social structure, there is the ever increasing possibility of a vicious spiral of relativity. This is because every perspective will ultimately come to see itself as a partial one and bound by social conditions even as it denounces others for their social origins. No group may claim to be the bearer of universality, neither the proletariat nor a universal intellectual vanguard. Mannheim considers the sociology of knowledge to be a way out of this situation of plurality and conflict by providing a complete description of all the forces in society in order to understand every ideology and locate its specific social causes. As Ricoeur points out, this project ultimately rests on the case for a sociology that stands outside of its object and for the position of the sociologist as a disinterested observer of the competing ideologies.[72] This stance is quite obviously illogical in the light of Mannheim's own ontology. The necessity for an absolute observer who undertakes research along the lines of Weber's value-free sociology is ultimately the downfall of his argument.

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70 K. Mannheim, Ideology and Utopia (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972)

71 Ibid. pp. 84-5

72 P. Ricoeur, Lectures on Ideology and Utopia, ed. by G. H. Taylor (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 171.

Mannheim speaks of the striving towards a ever-widening total view of the whole of all the limited points of view. This is a quasi-Hegelian attitude without the foundations of the Hegelian Absolute Knowledge. According to Ricoeur, Mannheim fails ultimately to admit that we are trapped within the circle between reflection and ideology, and to admit that total reflection is not a human possibility.[73] It is only if one believes that it is necessary to perform reflection free of ideology in order to produce knowledge that one will see this circle as a problem, however. As soon as the nature of the human situation is grasped as one that is irredeemably caught within a finitude that prevents such aseptic knowledge and one realizes that previous attempts to provide Archimedian points have been on the wrong track, then one can accept the limitations of knowledge. Ricoeur argues that this aporia of Mannheim's provides fertile ground for a understanding of the relationship between ideology, reflection, and critique. He says:

> what we must assume is that the judgment on an ideology is always the judgment from a utopia. This is my conviction: the only way to get out of the circularity in which ideologies engulf us is to assume a utopia, declare it, and judge an ideology on this basis. Because the onlooker is impossible, then it is someone within the process itself who takes the responsibility for judgment.... the judgment is always a point of view - a polemical point of view though one which claims to assume a better future for humanity - and a point of view which declares itself as such. It is to the extent finally that the correlation ideology-utopia replaces the impossible correlation ideology-science that a certain solution to the problem of judgment may be found, a solution.... itself congruent with the claim that no point of view exists outside the game.[74]

This conviction of Ricoeur's assumes a basic dialectical nature to social life. It assumes that there is present in the ontology of social life an

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[73] Ibid, p. 171
[74] Ibid. p. 172-3.

oscillation that provides the rhythms of change and conflict, stability and integration with an impulse that is almost theological in its dualist conception of the struggle between ideology and utopia. In order to avoid such a simplistic schema, however, he does qualify the nature both of ideology and utopia so that both concepts eventually come to embody much of each other in a complex interrelation of mutual constitution. As far as Ricoeur's own philosophy is concerned this interpretation of social life is merely one more symbolic representation of life that attempts to catch its own reflection through an endless articulation of human existence via the long detour through symbols, values, beliefs and Weltanschauung of human culture.

Ricoeur does not break out from the basic circular nature of the problem and thus can in some ways be seen as merely repeating the aporia of how one is to practise critique from a position within the processes that are constitutive of critique. With judgement being placed within a hermeneutic circle the intractable problem of the distinction between ideology and science in social life is dissolved, but does this necessarily make the nature of critique any more transparent? What it does do is situate the problem of critique and reflection firmly in human finitude, where critical judgement is part of the on-going process of the constitution of social life. This does not, however, provide those who are looking for answers with answers. It simply states that it is only with the making of judgements and the asking of questions that one begins to open up human finitude. Critique is firmly embedded in the historicity of human culture.

Ricoeur finds in Mannheim's characterization of utopia hints of how we might conceive of the hermeneutic distantiation he believes is possible in

social life. These are the two formal criteria of utopia which Mannheim proposes. The first criterion is that of a certain noncongruence or noncoincidence with the state of reality in which utopia occurs. This definition immediately begs the question of what 'reality' is, however as Ricoeur points out: "Mannheim seems to want to return to a nonevaluative concept of both reality and ideology precisely in order to judge what is and what is not congruent."[75] Mannheim attempts to resolve this dilemma by claiming that one can have a understanding of the whole by being thoroughly aware of the limited scope of every point of view. This, however, still begs the question of why such an reflective grasp is to be considered above the limitations imposed upon other definitions of reality because of their social origins.

The second formal criterion for utopia is much more promising for an understanding of critique according to Ricoeur. This is that a utopia tends to undermine the prevailing order in opposition to ideology which tends to preserve the order from whence it originates. On a simple level the sterility of ideology is opposed to the fruitfulness of utopia which acts as a catalyst for change. For Ricoeur this is too simple a schema because it ignores the positive functions of ideology as well as the negative effects of utopian discourse.

In ordinary language the concept of utopia is normally pejorative; it is that which is precisely unrealizable, an empty fantasy bearing no relation to reality. In a crucial sense this depends upon who is speaking in the labelling of the chimerical nature of utopia. Although the formal definition of utopia that Mannheim proposes aims to be nonevaluative this very possibility seems to be denied by the perspectival constitution

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[75] Ibid. p. 171.

of social existence. Hence what appears as utopian is always relative to a status quo and those protecting this status quo will be inclined to call utopian everything that goes beyond the present existing order, no matter if it be an absolute utopia or a relative one realizable within certain conditions. By obscuring this distinction the present order can suppress the validity claims of a relative utopia which aims for realistic change. It thus becomes a question of who decides what is realizable within a given social life. Those who are dominant are able to impose their interpretation of social existence as the real, and hence any challenge to this can be dismissed as utopian in the sense of fantastical. Realizability thus becomes an empty criteria for the definition of utopia because this is subject itself to social conflict. If the criteria for determining what is realizable are in actuality always provided by the representatives of dominant or ascendent groups then the notion of utopia as a positive challenge to the order that they promote can never establish itself. From this perspective, by definition utopia belongs to the marginal; to those dispossessed of the power to impose their interpretation of reality and in consequence it remains unrealisable and illusory.

Instead of being caught within a bind here and having to admit the inadequacy of the concept of utopia for an understanding of critique, Ricoeur argues that this situation throws light upon possible criteria for a definition of the ideological. It is the capacity to reveal something as ideological which utopian possibilities establish. This is firmly embedded in the problem of power, however. If it is always a utopia which defines what is ideological, characterization is always relative to the assumptions of conflicting groups. Thus, any claim to a scientific view of ideology is merely a claim. Ricoeur argues that this insight is just another way of

saying with Aristotle that in human matters we cannot expect the same kind of accuracy as in scientific matters. Politics is not a science, but an art of orientating oneself among conflicting groups. Moreover, the definition of politics must itself remain polemical.[76] If utopias shatter and ideologies preserve given orders then the nature of domination and the place of power in the structure of human existence become central. The question is not only who has power but how is a system of power legitimized. Thus ultimately it is legitimacy which is at stake in the conflict between ideology and utopia, but not the kind of legitimacy that requires a meta-narrative of universal normative standards..

One might ask how far Ricoeur's analysis has really advanced our understanding of critique. Insofar as it is a interpretation of how we are to understand ideology and utopia it remains itself as particular as any other. That it is a plausible description really only comes about in the social milieu of Mannheim's modern intellectual seeking to grasp the specific ideologies of all social groups in a particular society. It is not so plausible for instance, to a Lukacsian Marxist who claims that the proletariat expresses the universal interests of the totality. Unless Ricoeur is appealing to the quasi-Hegelian survey of the whole, which he chastises Mannheim for implicitly proposing, then it is hard to see how his claim that utopia acts as a shatterer of fast-frozen social forms functions. One still wants to know by what right a utopian criticism of existing relations claims to be valid as a motivation for action. The notion of critique as a source of valid judgements about social existence is once again replaced by those forces of social existence that are in opposition to the prevailing dominant forces, echoing Foucault's linkage

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[76] Ibid. pp. 178-9. This echoes the understanding of theoretical models of power as always already contested models. See note 27, chapter four.

of genealogy with the subjugated. The question remains: why side with the powerless, the marginal and the oppressed (profoundly un-Nietzschean in Foucault's case!) rather than the empowered? Unless one is able to specify why the utopian frame of mind (in this sense of the disenfranchised frame of mind) is privileged over the ideological, one remains unable to justify the claim of utopia to be critical simply because of its "preservation of distance between itself and reality."[77] The burden of proof in Ricoeur's interpretation remains with those who wish to change existing social relations.

Ricoeur in some ways circumvents this problem by appealing to the fact that societies are constituted by noncongruence in the form of social conflict at some level or another. The absence of this phenomena according to Ricoeur would signify the very "death of society" because there would be "no distance, no ideals, no project at all."[78] Society is functioning here as an concept that is by definition riven by ideology and utopia. The notion that we are facing the end of ideology in modern post-industrial society is precisely the ideological concealment of opposing ideals and projects. I think that Ricoeur is right to stress this connection of utopia with opposing ideals and projects and I hope to show in the next chapter that it is a stress that limits Foucault's will to dispersion in a productive way. Ricoeur argues that there is no mind which liberates itself suddenly without the support of something else[79] and certainly an understanding of historiography that uproots all our identities is one that attempts to deny this.

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77 Ibid. p. 180.
78 Ibid. This echoes the postmodern argument that consensus is a dangerous political concept because ultimately it prefigures the total society. See Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition, p. 66.
79 Recall Foucault's comment that "thought cannot help but liberate and enslave" in OT,328.

Chapter 6

Foucault and Ricoeur: Dispersive Versus Comprehensive Utopias

> For me, history can be conceived only in *n* dimensions. This is indispensable. Its fundamental definition is of a concrete *pluridimensional history ... life is multiple, but it is also one.*[1]

On reading Paul Ricoeur's article "Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology"[2] one is struck by the all too effortless arbitration between the philosophical positions of Habermas and Gadamer. The suspicion that this is a false synthesis, dissolving genuine differences can never be far from the reader's mind. Is the result a bland philosophy of hope or an insight into the genuine common roots that both thinkers in their desire to delineate strong positions had themselves covered over? The latter conclusion emerges to the fore given that both philosophers had themselves engaged in a fruitful debate between their respective positions that had seen both seek to come to an understanding about their respective similarities and differences. The possibility of such a dialogue is always an indication in philosophy that there is something more to say, especially about hidden concerns that both partners share, and that this something more is guided by the philosophical position of a desire to reach an understanding in the first place. This desire, for example, immediately sets off the Habermas/Gadamer debate from the Derrida/Gadamer debate that failed to take place some years later. Marked as they are by the shared influence of Heidegger the latter couple's lack of dialogue might indeed seem perverse. However, this can be explained on a simple level as highlighting Derrida's suspicion of ever securing understanding and concern for difference in all its manifestations. Given this position of a suspicion about the very desire

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1 F. Braudel, "On a Concept of Social History" in On History, p. 131.
2 In HHS. See also "Ethics and Culture: Habermas and Gadamer in Dialogue", Philosophy Today, 17, (1973)

to reach understanding and agreement, a desire that is as prevalent in Habermas' philosophical ethos as it is in Gadamer's, it is no wonder that Derrida's refusal of an encounter has been seen as a strategic response to the dangers of a hermeneutics of understanding.[3]

What would Ricoeur himself make of this unfulfilled dialogue? It might be argued that Ricoeur had made it easy for himself in dissolving the false antimony "between an ontology of prior understanding and an eschatology of freedom",[4] a conflation of interests might be harder to sustain if he took the work of Derrida as the foil for philosophical hermeneutics. This is more so in the case of Foucault. Would it be so easy to put him into a relationship with hermeneutics? The immediate answer is of course no. Any attempt to appropriate the critical strategies developed by Foucault into an expanded philosophical reflection based ultimately upon the hermeneutical drive to understanding must necessarily cut short their own peculiar applicability as interventions of force.

One position that could be taken over this possibility would be to argue that the critical point to Foucault's own work arises precisely from the aggressive stance it takes towards all philosophies of the subject and that his attitude towards historical consciousness is particularly concerned to avoid the appropriating tendencies of philosophical hermeneutics. More importantly, given Foucault's understanding of the modern age as defined by "History" as the "unavoidable element in our thought" which is "probably not so very different from Classical Order", it would be an absolute travesty to characterise his work as a desire to

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3 See David Wood, Philosophy at the Limit (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990), pp. 118-30.
4 HHS,100.

continue this seemingly "unavoidable element". Another position that can be taken, is that Foucault's decision to remove the problems of the philosophy of the subject by a fierce reduction of it to merely the effect of systems of discourse or apparatuses of power/knowledge (PK,117) inevitably leads him into problems that can only be resolved by giving the subject a larger role albeit one that is not transcendental; and this of course is to be provided by a philosophical hermeneutics. This would be to take the notion of the 'unavoidability' of history far more traditionally as the starting point for a critical practice rather than that which one seeks to transgress in order to continue critique.

Between these two sketchy positions the possibility of a Ricoeurian mediation might lie but it is far from obvious or promising at first glance. There is, for instance, the common concern of history and its philosophical importance. Philosophical hermeneutics as developed by Gadamer, for instance, from the work of Heidegger, places immense significance upon the historicity of man and understanding. Foucault similarly places great emphasis upon radically historicising philosophy and social practice but under the influence of Nietzsche this becomes something extremely different to the centrality of historicity as understood by Gadamer. Indeed history is so placed into question as being a recent production of 'man', which in turn is also a recent production of the modern "*épisteme*", that Foucault was often accused of being anti-historical. Foucault of course did not intend to be so construed and yet there is something more than just rhetoric in his claim that "Discourse is not life: its time is not your time", (AK,211) something which aims at a rupture from the position of historical understanding as the master framework in which to produce critical strategies in the present. In order to preserve the effect of this

distance from historical understanding it is necessary to be clear about Foucault's own practice of archaeology and genealogy and to understand his reasons for opposing traditional methods of historical inquiry. Although in a simple sense Foucault is at great pains to claim that to understand the present we must understand the past, this understanding is by no means easily achievable and is itself fraught with dangers, not least that traditional historical methods have functioned to legitimate present practices rather than help in transforming them. The presentation of archaeology and genealogy as techniques that enable a certain transgression of traditional historical methods is as we have seen in chapter three, crucial to Foucault's strategy. This is when his work appears the most provocative and thus perhaps unavoidably radical. It is also the point at which he is vulnerable to criticism because of the suggestion of the desire to go beyond the work of reason and oppose it by an appeal to an other of reason. As the criticisms of Derrida point out, this particular strategy is itself prone to contradiction, and also to the specific dangers of utopianism and naturalism. Foucault is quick to disassociate his own project from such ends, however, and it is this that should immediately sensitize us to the much more subtle, and difficult, strategies that he does employ in order to continue critique in full consciousness of the enslaving discourse of historical understanding. This desire to produce work in 'full consciousness' of the problem of historicity is also a point at which Foucault's strategy begins to fall into contradiction. For it is at this point that his own strategy repeats the Enlightenment desire to work within a space that is not a space, a historical nominalism that seeks to undermine its own situatedness because of the dangers of co-option and reformism. This repetition is curiously similar to the desire to write beyond the history of the Same and articulate the Other that

Derrida had exposed as dangerously utopian and ultimately impossible. Although Foucault may have aimed at a history of the present that avoided such utopianism, his own strategies might in fact repeat the structures of such forms of thought on a tacit level.

And yet there is also in Foucault's work a strong thesis that the founding of political practice upon a future *telos* that breaks with the present is also to remain locked within the present system. This is the reasoning behind his remark "that to imagine another system is to extend our participation in the present system." (LCP,230) Taking as his example the Soviet Union, Foucault argues that its apparently radical institutions were modelled upon those of "bourgeois society in the nineteenth century" and that this was a result of the "Utopian tendencies" of the Soviet experiment rather than because of practical difficulties. Even though this may be an underestimation of the pressing concerns that afflicted the nascent Soviet state, as is pointed out by one of his interviewers, Foucault's point is that such concerns (the forming of a stable and economically strong state) are themselves the product of theoretical models that ultimately are utopian in character and that this utopianism is as much the function of the myriad practices of social administration and disciplinary techniques as of visionary politics. This leads him to wonder whether we should not "reject theory and all forms of general discourse" because the "need for theory is still part of the system" which produces the oppressive totality of the nation state and all its disciplinary armatures. (LCP,231) Theory, in the form of both grand meta-narratives or the micro-techniques of social administration for the ordering, functioning, and improvement of social life are as much the problem to be faced as the solution to present

difficulties, and something that politics invariably fails to reflect upon.[5] It is what might be termed the 'unthought' of Western politics as it has developed since the Greeks.

Foucault's concern is to expose the problematic condition of such a politics that does not recognize its formation from the desire to control nature and society and in doing so leaves itself open to an ever burgeoning will to power that seeks to resolve all problems via an instrumental reason. He shares such a thesis with other interpreters of modernity, notably Adorno and Horkheimer in The Dialectic of Enlightenment and Heidegger in his later works concerning the technological, subject oriented nature of the modern age.[6] This is something Foucault is well aware of, his essay "What is Enlightenment" is in some sense a re-affirmation of such thinkers concerns and a placing of his own project within such a tradition. What Foucault shares with such thinkers is a suspicion of projecting utopias in the service of radical change. This suspicion immediately places a bind upon the projection of any formulation of alternative social practices. How are we to produce non-utopian projections if projection is itself a characteristic of utopian thinking? Foucault's immediate and somewhat vague response is that instead of the possibility of utopia he would oppose present "unsatisfactory" practices with "actual experiences":

> It is possible that the rough outline of a future society is supplied by the recent experiences with drugs, sex, communes, other forms of consciousness, and other forms of individuality. If scientific socialism emerged from the *Utopias* of the nineteenth century, it is possible that a real socialization will emerge, in the twentieth century from *experiences*. (LCP,231)

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5 See "Polemics, Politics, and Problematizations: An Interview" in The Foucault Reader, pp. 385-6

6 M. Heidegger, The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays.

Speaking just after the events of May '68 and the transformations in certain sections of society that the sixties had apparently brought about, Foucault's remarks now seem naively optimistic (utopian?) themselves.[7] More importantly, what is the status of this "real socialization"? Is it not defined in relation to the transcendent and fantastical discourse of utopian projects? The question that immediately springs to mind here, is what legitimates Foucault's confidence that such actual experiences can claim the authority that is signified by the adjective "real"? Does not such an appeal to 'reality' veer dangerously close to an appeal to the present, or in other terms, the 'presence' of the actual?

It is at such points, when Foucault is attempting to steer a path between the dangerous utopianism of theoretical solutions and the repetition of the Same that is political reformism, that Foucault himself begins to sound politically ineffective. As remarked above, this is to judge Foucault's strategy by a discourse (the political) that he wishes to question as to the "position it takes and the reasons it gives for this"[8] One would need to ask what value is being placed upon the notion of political effectiveness here and whether it does not contribute to a suppression of alternative practices and frameworks for understanding. Foucault's suspicion of this tendency to judge alternative practices by existing political frameworks is perfectly valid and yet it itself prone to his own strictures on the nature of utopian theoretical practice. This is why he has been accused of justifying the status quo by Marxists and of spuriously proclaiming the 'end of politics' and

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[7] Although, see J. Minson on the irrelevance of 1968 for Foucault's thought, Genealogies of Morals, pp. 41-2

[8] The Foucault Reader, p. 385.

contributing to a radicalism shorn of "a choice *between* powers".[9] It seems that in attempting to have the best of both worlds: a critical practice that is not totalising and hence not utopian and yet is still 'beyond' traditional political frameworks and hence echoing utopian desires, Foucault has placed his practice in an impossible bind. Yet his refusal to offer alternatives could be symptomatic rather than a cause of this tension. Foucault resolutely denies that he is practising critique from a position outside of our present framework, this is the point of genealogy, and is the reason why he opposes utopian projections of an alternative future to be worked towards. Yet there remains a residue of a desire to be beyond current practices, especially in terms of traditional political solutions, that conditions his critical practice. This is the second sense of utopian which, along with the first, he attempts to position himself between in order to create a fruitful strategy out of their tension. It might be argued that he fails to really escape the dangers of the second sense of utopia, however. This would justify one in labelling his work as aspiring to precisely the kind of 'non-place' which he criticises as the starting point for both objective history and general discourses on the "whole of society". (LCP,232-3)

That this is a possible characterisation of Foucault's work arises perhaps from his scepticism about the universality or naturalness of the Western political framework that encourages a certain conception of the subject and the possibility of transformation of the systems that subject inhabits. His work on the disciplinary apparatuses of modernity aim at showing how the modern subject is not just repressed by certain social structures from which it can liberate itself, but is an essential element

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9 P. Dews, "The *Nouvelle Philosophie* and Foucault", in Towards a Critique of Foucault, p. 100.

in the constitution of such systems. If this is the case, however, it remains of immense importance to ascertain just what is implied by the hypothesis that subjects are as much if not more the effects of power/knowledge regimes than the producers of such systems. Certainly it is not a blind functionalism that Foucault wishes to imply by revealing the manifold levels of discursive constitution that produces the modern subject. Rather, as I have argued in chapter four, the unavoidable horizon that one has to place his work within is not that of a pessimism about social change but that of the tremendous complexity involved in social practice and hence difficulty in the conscious transformation of such practice.

Crucial to this notion of complexity is that it also consists of an unavoidably opaque element. This is not a thesis about the futility of social change but a claim that no matter how much one attempts to make discursively explicit the nature of the systems one inhabits, there will always remain a residue of unanticipated practices and conditions. The notion that one can become completely clear about one's situation is an impossible dream that has contributed to the type of dangerous utopias that Foucault is concerned to expose as the reactive product of modern disciplinary societies. Given that complete penetration of the social complex is impossible and the desire to achieve it a sort of *hubris*, Foucault's call for a genealogy of the micro-practices of power/knowledge makes sense. The will to transform our existence is prevented from becoming an over-inflated will to power by curtailing its ambitions and channelling the desire for change into local and immediately problematic areas of social existence. There is something quite Greek about this attitude, a philosophical ethos that bears comparison with the Aristotelian tradition of practical philosophy which

as Gadamer points out, is different from the "putatively specialized knowledge of the expert who enters upon the task of politics and legislation like a nonparticipating observer."[10]

The linkage that Gadamer makes between hermeneutics and practical philosophy here revolves around the tremendous importance of our unacknowledged cultural background as the origin of our normative practices. This is not something that is immutable, however. Gadamer characterises practical philosophy thus:

> Practical philosophy presupposes that we are already shaped by the normative images or ideas in the light of which we have been brought up and that lie at the basis of the order of our entire social life. That does not at all suggest that these normative perspectives remain fixed immutably and would be beyond criticism. Social life consists of a constant process of transformation of what previously has been held valid. But it would surely be an illusion to want to deduce normative notions in *abstracto* and to posit them as valid with the claim of scientific rectitude. The point here is a notion of science that does not allow for the ideal of the nonparticipating observer but endeavours instead to bring to our reflective awareness the communality that binds everyone together.[11]

This endorsement of a practical philosophy of finitude contrasts starkly with Foucault's own version. Genealogy too, is opposed to finding "its support outside of time" and pretending to "base its judgements on an apocalyptic objectivity." (NGH,87) It is explicit also in its "affirmation of knowledge as perspective." Even though genealogy shares this rejection of a scientific methodologism aiming at timeless truths with philosophical hermeneutics and practical philosophy, it veers violently away from the ethos of a consideration of the limits of social action and reason. Instead genealogy as "effective history" seeks to engage in an almost warlike

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[10] H. G. Gadamer, "Hermeneutics as a Theoretical and Practical Task" in Reason in the Age of Science, p. 135.
[11] Ibid. p. 135.

transgression of our taken for granted assumptions precisely because they are constitutive of our being. The conclusion to be drawn from the constant transformation of social life is not that there is a unitary thread of participation that binds every interpretation but rather that: "humanity installs each of its violences in a system of rules and thus proceeds from domination to domination." (NGH,85)

The genealogical 'recording' of these rules has obviously been transformed here from the simple transcribing of the "systems of rules" that have appeared to an active interpretative stance that applies a deeply partisan judgement. Where philosophical hermeneutics may be characterised as possessing a important drive to bridge the gaps created by the 'violence' of interpretation, genealogy's desire is to drive a wedge between such attempts at interpretative fusion, which it sees as dangerously unhistorical in its search for unities.

In short the difference between the two is their attitudes towards the conceptual couplet continuity/discontinuity. This is of course a gross exaggeration of the actual practices of hermeneutics and genealogy but nevertheless a crucial point of divergence. Philosophical hermeneutics as developed by Gadamer is concerned to emphasize the notion of distanciation involved in "effective historical consciousness". As Ricoeur puts it:

> Effective history is efficacy at a distance..... Thus, the 'fusion of horizons' which happens in every transmission of meaning can occur precisely because of the 'tension between the other and the self, between the text of the past and the point of view of the reader.[12]

Continuity here is not a smooth transition from interpretation to interpretation in Hegelian sublation, but a process that is a play of finite interpretations which can never be articulated in one single horizon. Equally, Foucault is concerned not to be taken as advocating a philosophy of absolute discontinuity. Instead he aims to "untie all those knots that historians have patiently tied" to increase differences and blur the "lines of communication,...to make it more difficult to pass from one thing to another". (AK,170) In its archaeological instantiation, Foucault's historical sense:

> considers that the same, the repetitive, and the uninterrupted are no less problematic than the ruptures; for archaeology, the identical and the continuous are not what must be found at the end of the analysis; they figure in the element of a discursive practice; they too are governed by the rules of formation of positivities... they themselves are actively, regularly formed. (AK,174)

The point is not to replace continuity with rupture but to analyse "change and transformations" without recourse to the traditional reductive metaphors of 'movement', 'flux', and 'evolution'.

Nevertheless, Foucault is concerned to avoid these traditional props of continuous history for a ultimately political reason. As we have seen in chapter three, the political motivation behind the questioning of the document is clear, yet as Foucault articulates it there is a residue of ambiguity about this questioning. As we have seen the new "general history" endeavours to 'work' upon documents from "within" and to

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[12] HHS, 76, and see p. 74.

"develop it". Now when Foucault characterises this work as dividing, distributing, ordering, arranging, serialising, defining unities, describing relations, it would seem to be a deeper extension of traditional historiography, despite, or maybe because of, its structuralistic appeal to conceptual knowledge. What after all is distinguishing "between what is relevant and what is not", if not the work of historical judgement. Distinguishing between relevant or irrelevant patterns and series is no less the province of traditional historiography than Foucault's alternative. Foucault's concern with discursive formations prior to individual consciousness is the real point of difference between traditional questioning of historical archives and his own. Whereas traditional questioning starts from the assumption that the document is produced by a subjectivity that was the master of its production and meaning, Foucault intends to produce a history where the subject is a historical matrix to be investigated rather than taken for granted. This is not only because the transcendental subject has been a major element in the justification of a impossible and politically dangerous total history, but because it is itself an historical phenomena that arises in the modern age. One can only surmise that the methods Foucault devises in order to displace the human subject as consciousness from the theoretical concern of history are designed to produce a historical sensibility that is itself marked by historicity and consequently in some sense a 'better' history.

No doubt at the point when Foucault wrote AK the possibility of challenging the "great historico-transcendental destiny of the West" (AK,210) with its privileging of continuous history and a sovereign consciousness that ensures this through the mastery of meaning, was easier to formulate in terms of a radical de-subjectification of history.

Foucault's ambiguity, or rather unwillingness to site his own archaeological machinery, except as an as yet preliminary and scarcely stable discourse about discourses, clearly stands out at the beginning and the end of the book, however. (AK,17, 205-8) That the seemingly innocent practice of organizing the document into relevant relations is as much a political activity as any other emerges with a vengeance in Foucault's subsequent methodological tract: "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History". As we have seen, genealogy is equally vehement in its refusal of objective, continuous history.

Historical sensibility as Foucault formulates it in NGH is based upon an opposition to "the three Platonic modalities of history." It therefore does take certain values as important in the practice of genealogy, Foucault defines them thus:

> The first is parodic, directed against reality, and opposes the theme of history as reminiscence or recognition; the second is dissociative, directed against identity, and opposes history given as continuity or representation or a tradition; the third is sacrificial, directed against truth, and opposes history as knowledge. They imply a use of history that severs its connection to memory, its metaphysical and anthropological model, and constructs a countermemory - a transformation of history into a totality different form of time. (NGH,93)

These three modes of a new historical sensibility are closely interrelated, each drawing upon the implications of the others to produce a counter-history that functions through an inversion of traditional historiographical values. The desires to grasp 'reality' unsullied by our own historical position, to create stable identities from the continuity of tradition, and to reach universal truths through historical research, are all called into question as productive of exclusionary narratives that cover over the heterogeneity and mutability of history.

With this new understanding of historical existence comes a dilemma, however. The decision to privilege anti-Platonic modalities of history cannot arise from what might be termed a greater understanding of the mechanisms of history for it too is prey to the dissipations of further interpretation. Although Foucauldian genealogy purportedly takes its strength from revealing the inadequacies of history as practised in the West since the nineteenth century, it cannot be claiming a closer relationship to the truth, for on Foucault's own terms this would merely be a repetition of the claims of traditional historiography. Rather, it should be seen as operating as an interpretation that emerges from a systematic reversal: "the violent or surreptitious appropriation of a system of rules,... in order to impose a direction, to bend it to a new will, to force its participation in a different game." Genealogy cannot exempt itself from the chain of dominations but must take its own historical understanding as the point at which its own justifications begin.

This is not to imply that anything like the traditional justifications for discourse that the West produces are to be applied to genealogy. This is especially the case with the justifications that emerge from the will to truth that Foucault sees as increasingly assimilating all other systems in an implacable machinery designed to exclude. (OD,56) Here we have the key to genealogy's status. For it is a machinery that is not designed to exclude but to recover "subjugated knowledges" from the hierarchical claims of a "theoretical, unitary, formal and scientific discourse". (PK,85) It is a machinery that contests the power that emanates from the will to truth and the "attempt to think in terms of a totality" which has produced a certain blindness in research. (PK,81) The point to Foucault's

onslaught on the objectivity, continuity, and truth that history has hitherto taken as its principle values is that, such values, despite their claims to comprehensiveness, exclude differences because of the very desire to reach a totality. History, not only buries "the ruptural effects of conflict and struggle" (PK,82) but represses its own origin in "nineteenth-century Europe: the land of interminglings and bastardy, the period of the 'man-of-mixture.'" (NGH,92) A real "historical knowledge of struggles" has been impossible because the access to this: specialised areas of erudition and disqualified, popular knowledge, has been "even up to this day... confined to the margins of knowledge." (PK,83)

In the attempt to reinstate these margins, however, new margins are created. The values of identity and continuity are placed under suspicion because of the political effects they have become implicated with and are thus pushed to the margins of genealogical concern. Genealogy initiates its own exclusions in order to function in the struggle for dominance. Foucault voices the concern that genealogies might themselves "run the risk of re-codification, recolonisation" (PK,86) and become part of the dominant discourse as soon as they are no longer ignored and discredited. This outcome might seem highly unlikely given the nature of Western societies. Rather, as Foucault points out, genealogies are much more likely to be greeted with a "prudent silence" that seeks to devalue their claims as well as forestall institutional entry. Nevertheless, this probable position of permanent opposition to dominant discourse, although bestowing upon genealogy an appearance of equally permanent radicalism, does not mean it is thereby free of exclusionary processes. For if it is possible to say that genealogy will never be a "homogeneous theoretical" discourse because it ceaselessly questions the

desire for such a discourse, this does not mean that it is thereby free of its own strategies of constitution.

These strategies are invariably based upon criticisms of existing practices that have become taken for granted. Thus we have the negative work carried out in the chapter "The Unities of Discourse" in AK debunking the diverse themes of continuity in order to clear a space for Foucault's own machinery of discourse analysis which remains stronger on articulating what it is not, rather than what it is. There are also the negative judgements made by the genealogical studies upon the practices of the disciplinary society and of the *scientia sexualis*. Although these practices are not criticised by an appeal to another standard of social organisation they are nevertheless, strongly decried both for their consequences and because they arrogantly assert themselves as a progression from previous practices.[13] It is precisely because modernity sees itself as having to give itself its own normative foundations and be self-generating, that it is seen as being sunk deeper into the pit of unreflectiveness and more arrogant than previous epochs. That this self-confidence in its own legitimations is a problem is acknowledged by all those who would wish to rescue the project of modernity, however. Maybe it should be viewed as a condition of increased rather than decreased reflection. Certainly it is as much an unhistorical assumption as any other to proclaim our present age as more narrow minded than any other.

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13 Along with this arrogance of progression there is also a certain privileging of the present that seems essential to its own self-image. This is why modernity is seen as being so dangerous for thinkers such as Heidegger and Foucault. See J. Caputo on Heidegger's philosophy as a contestation of the master names for Being, "Demythologizing Heidegger: *Aletheia* and the History of Being", The Review of Metaphysics, Vol. XLI, No. 3, (March 1988).

Foucault's technique of starkly contrasting differing orders is renowned. The punishment of Damiens in DP serves as an origin from which the West has supposedly progressed. The "monotonous nights of the Victorian bourgeoisie" have long been left behind in the quest for sexual liberation. (HS,3-5) These, of course, are the simple narratives that Foucault subverts through his genealogical research. The present is dependent upon the past but in ways much more insidious and dangerous than previously thought. Instead of progression we have the replacement of systems of exclusion and division for ever more implacable and invisible regimes. It is almost a narrative of Enlightenment in reverse, except that Foucault does not really believe that there was a golden age left behind. If he does look to the time when the "Greek Logos had no contrary", (MC,xiii) or when an aesthetics of existence was the dominant problematization of the free, adult male of Greek society (HS,2,253) this is more a comparison of different systems in order to shake present assumptions rather than a expression of longing for a Greek golden age. Indeed there is hardly any intimation of such desires in Foucault's work after Madness and Civilisation, to the extent that his few isolated remarks about the possibility of new ways of being are eagerly gleaned from his statements either as an indication of his largely undeveloped and incoherent normative foundations or as the implicit desire driving his "patient labour giving form to our impatience for liberty." (WE,50)

Either way, genealogy cannot effectively escape judgement as to its desires. A radical counter-discourse that emerges in opposition to perceived dominant discourses, such as history and the theoretical totalisations of philosophy, functions, no matter how self-consciously, as a recovery of those buried and disqualified knowledges and experiences

that constitute the other of Reason or the tradition. That in some cases these obliterated experiences can no longer be articulated, as for example, that of madness before the monologue of reason strait-jacket it into a moral and medical problem, implies that the notions of recovery or restoration are not necessarily the right ones to use for Foucault's practice. Nevertheless there is an important sense in which the articulation of the limits of present thought, language, discourse, etc., through the presentation of the alterity at their heart, remains a task of disclosure. This task, which parallels that of a hermeneutics of suspicion in seeking to foreground the hidden structures of exclusion that constitute current practices and understandings of the Western tradition, radically diverges from such a hermeneutics by making the transgression of the limits it uncovers a constant project. This is where Foucault's genealogy departs from a theory of interpretation that seeks to recover "the extinguished voices of the past" in order to bring them into a ever expanding tradition. (TN,3,223) The sense of the possible that emerges from Foucault's own discourse is a product not of the spinning of a multitude of alternatives, least of all one master remedy, but a product of a relentless differentiation of the interpretations that currently hold sway. The weaving of a more inclusive and less constraining tradition is not the aim of genealogy because it knows that there will always remain a residue, a limit, an outside to this production. Hence, the repeated imagery of warfare that Foucault chooses to couch his own understanding of how genealogical practice proceeds. Whatever interpretation a particular genealogy places on the present, and by implication the past and the future as well, it cannot appeal to a place above the power conflicts of the society from which it emerges.

And yet there is nevertheless an underlying moral thrust to this rhetoric of war, conflict and struggle. Might we not also detect a strong puritanical streak in Foucault's adoption of such rhetoric. Despite the appearance of a rejection of ordinary moral arguments, war is being waged on behalf of the dispossessed, the suppressed, and that which has hitherto been neglected as trivial and contemptible. Despite Foucault's protestations to the contrary, there is a strong element of speaking for others that cannot be eliminated in this advocacy of the permanent belligerence of the Other. Even though theoretical practice may take up the cause of already existing struggles and not attempt to represent their 'truth' but serve as an instrument for strategic use, there are still difficulties in such a neutral, tool-like image of discourse. The notion that theoretical practice conducted in an academic institution can act purely as a relay between one set of practices to another and remain neutral in its effects is naive and precisely a notion that Foucault is concerned to dispel. Yet in presenting his own position in an as effacing way as possible, and as seeking to renounce any links it might have with the origin of struggles, Foucault begins to sound as if he believes in the possibility of serving the struggles he chooses to stand alongside in an objective, impartial way. So to be consistent, Foucault has to accept that his own work, not only acts as an articulation of existing power struggles in a different voice, but is also constitutive to some extent of these struggles. This I have argued is particularly the case in his reversal of the ordinary understanding of historiography. Of course the extent to which his discourse is a product and producer of the relations is a matter for argument. Nevertheless the claim that the intellectual can no longer speak the truth to those who have yet to see it is merely the reversal of the belief that the intellectual's role consisted of this in golden age of bourgeois struggle.

To overturn such a simplistic view of the intellectual's role, even though it may exist as a dominant (and by thus by definition dangerous) conception of her role in society, can only be an initial move in a much more complex attempt at understanding the nature of power as it exists in its current forms and the part academic discourse in the form of genealogy plays in reinforcing as well as subverting these current forms.

This would perhaps mean: not being so quick to dismiss as fascistic the notion that the intellectual can speak for others. Certainly the notion that the intellectual should aspire to possess the universal law and represent the interests of justice, is one that requires much scrutiny. Not just because, as Foucault points out, it belongs to a quite different age and is derived from "a quite specific historical figure" that may no longer be applicable to our own, (PK,126-9) but because the belief in the possibility of achieving such a universal consensus has waned to the extent that it has become an ever-receding goal which the desire to achieve has come to be seen as part of the problem rather than solution to conflicts. Despite this healthy scepticism about the function of the universal intellectual as a force somehow above the fray of battle, there is a danger that such scepticism threatens to swamp the equally healthy drive to seek systematic solutions to the systematic injustices of the modern world. The rejection of the category of the 'intellectual' as a free-floating arbiter of social interests, does not necessarily imply the rejection of the attempt to mediate between conflicting interests. Although we are a long way away from Mannheim's attempt to produce a non-evaluative mapping of every ideological viewpoint, there is still a moment in this attempt worth preserving. For if it is our ineluctable situation to judge from normative convictions then one might wonder

how this position can be reflectively come to terms with other than through the attempt to articulate the basis of ones judgements. In philosophical hermeneutical terms, this would be the central critical task of any reflection.

Now it may be that the limiting of this activity to a small group designated by the term 'intellectual' and consisting of a variety of sub-disciplines such as that of the historian, sociologist, psychoanalyst, etc. is something to be deplored in terms of its implications both for the control and production of knowledge and for the practice of a democratic politics. That this is the case, however, does not mean that such activity must therefore be dismissed. This is certainly not what Foucault advocates in terms of his own work. Indeed it is a common point of agreement amongst both his critics and supporters that the general movement of his work consists of the articulation of hitherto hidden processes, practices and structures that constitute the present. That this is in no way an attempt to lay down hard and fast universal principles of understanding is indicated by Foucault's own peculiar intellectual honesty (Nietzsche's famous *Redlichkeit*) in never failing to qualify his claims as the product of very specific historical and political circumstances. The paradoxes of reflection are not so easily dismissed via the rhetoric of war and perspectivism, however. The honesty of the modern intellectual is a crucial problem for Foucault, to the extent that the attempt to come to terms with its paradoxes leads him not to the honest failure of theory that plagues every intellectual who attempts to resolve them, but to a certain aestheticism:

> For me intellectual work is related to what you could call aestheticism, meaning transforming yourself... I am not interested in the academic status of what I am doing because my problem is my own transformation. (PPC,14)

Such a broad dismissal of the traditional role of the academic runs throughout Foucault's work, but it is nonetheless qualified by an understanding of the relationship between the intellectual and his audience that tacitly retains much of the original edifying element.[14] Thus, we are told that, although the History of Sexuality does not teach us an ethics in the sense of telling us how to act, it does intend to be an ethics on the level of one's relationship to oneself. It is in effect an attempt to show that an ethics of sexual behaviour is only contingently connected to the processes of revealing deep truths about one's sexuality and that there are other possible ways of relating to oneself, that of an "ethics of pleasure, of intensification of pleasure" being Foucault's preferred alternative. (PPC,15) Although this short-circuits the dangerous desire to be told deep truths about the world and oneself, it nevertheless remains a revelation that there is no such deep truth to be found. Foucault could not be more an exemplar of a equally important traditional quality of the intellectual here, that of the debunker. Allied to the call to transform oneself through a relationship to oneself that does not consist of following heteronomous laws, his own peculiar intellectual position can be viewed as much Socratic as Nietzschean. The call to build one's own ethics is as much a implication of Socratic *maieutics* as it might be of Nietzschean active nihilism and

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14 This traditional role is reflected in Foucault's argument that: "It is through the analyses that he carries out in his own field, to question over and over again what is postulated as self-evident, to disturb people's mental habits, the way they do and think things, to dissipate what is familiar and accepted, to reexamine rules and institutions and on the basis of this reproblematization... to participate in the formation of a political will (in which he has his role as a citizen to play). PPC, 265.

Foucault echoes the Socratic method of intellectual midwifery when he argues:

> People have to build their own ethics, taking as a point of departure the historical analysis, sociological analysis and so on, one can provide for them. I don't think that people who try to decipher the truth should have to provide ethical principles or practical advice at the same moment, in the same book and the same analysis. All this prescriptive network has to be elaborated and transformed by people themselves. (PPC,16)

The nature of this historical and sociological analysis appears peculiarly external in origin to those who might find a use for it. Not that this might be taken as a criticism of Foucault's work, only as a point of inconsistency with his own avowedly organic view of the relationship of theoretical work to practice. The notion of specific intellectuals who work "at the precise points where their own conditions of life or work situate them" does not seem to apply so clearly in the case of Foucault's own immediate sphere of activity, that of historical research. He as much as admits this when he states that his history of psychiatry from the seventeenth century to the beginning of the nineteenth century does not automatically constitute a vindication of the anti-psychiatrist movement. (PPC,15)[15] Nevertheless there is at least a case to be argued that Foucault addresses his own specific position by subjecting to historical analysis the claims of disciplines that constitute themselves as knowledges or sciences in order to gain effects of power. This, as he argues, enables one to see 'truth' as a "system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution and operation of statements" and linked to "systems of power that produce and sustain it, and to

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[15] Given that the history of madness is the history of the Other - of that which, for a given culture, is at once interior and foreign, therefore to be excluded to reduce the interior danger and its shut away to reduce its otherness; this claim has to be taken circumspectively.

effects of power which it induces and which extend it." (PK,133) Although this leaves the problem of how one is to compare the different political, economic, institutional regimes of the production of truth intact, it nonetheless opens out the intellectual's role in any regime to immense questioning. Detaching the "power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic and cultural, within which it operates at the present time." (PK,133) would mean at the least, a radical devaluation of the power of the academic as purveyor of solutions. Yet, if this is the case then it will equally apply to the notion of the academic as *bricoleur* providing tool-kits for others to use.

(i) Resistance as Utopian Desire

If Foucault refuses the utopias of liberation that have accompanied anthropocentric thinking this does not have to mean that our use of his work need couch itself in similar anti-utopian rhetoric.[16] Once we are more aware of the implications of employing such rhetorical strategies then the consequences of its use might become less debilitating and disastrous. We are after all, from the position of the late twentieth century, relatively cynical about the prospects of liberatory movements, especially those of a utopian bent, providing genuine radical change. From out of this cynicism a reconsideration of what might be termed post-metaphysical utopian desire is possible. This would be a desire that recognizes its own limits both in terms of fulfilment, and in terms of historical situatedness, something altogether different from traditional conceptions of utopian politics.

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[16] This is especially the case if we are to follow the example of Foucault's own admiration of the violence of interpretation and usage. See chapter one, p. 33.

This return to the tradition of utopian thinking can be seen in many of the new social movements that have emerged since the hey days of proclamations of the death of man. These have not just been on the Left but also been an important element in the rise of the New Right throughout the world in the 1980's. Although utopian thinking is usually associated with oppositional movements there is no reason to limit it to them. As Ruth Levitas points out, neo-liberal and conservative utopias have been very much the politically dominant projects of the last ten years in the industrialised West. They are as much concerned with change as other utopian projects even though they are often couched in terms of preservation of the status quo. Levitas argues that the "complaint that the utopian imagination has weakened may be a reflection of the fact that the dominant utopias are not recognised as such because utopists find them uncongenial."[17] The utopian nature of the conservative stress on tradition, authority, and nation refers "not simply to a past state, but to the past as immanent in the present."[18] Coupled with a utopian model of society based upon free market principles whilst still retaining a strong interventionist state in certain key areas, such projects have been "much more politically potent in terms of actually effecting change than the oppositional utopias of socialism, ecology or feminism in recent years."[19] This is in contrast to the traditional image of the true conservative, who lacking a vision of rational progress, distrusts theories of the meaning of history as the rhetoric of the Utopian Left and is alarmed by the notion of general change which might result in wholesale social engineering. Such an attitude often

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17 Ruth Levitas, The Concept of Utopia (Hemel Hempstead: Philip Allan, 1990), p. 186.
18 Ibid. p. 188.
19 Ibid. p. 189.

regards the research methods of history as an antidote to this sort of theory; being painstaking and attentive to the minutiae of human affairs. Levitas wonders whether:

> By defining these (New Right values) as utopias rather than ideologies we can ask whether there really has been a decline in the role of utopia in politics or whether, in the struggle between class committed projects, the utopias of subordinated groups have themselves been subordinated.[20]

My point in referring to Levitas' argument is to bring out the possible implications of a refusal of utopian thinking. Foucault's refusal of such modes of thinking arises from three major factors. First there is the historical factor of the failure of Marxist and other radical political projects to address their own power effects. This failure reveals itself most clearly precisely when such utopian revolutionary movements have succeeded in taking power, as in the Soviet Union or China, and attempted to realise a political programme which is more rational, more intelligent, more transparent, and hence better than the systems they replace. The main focus for Foucault here is the way in which such revolutions of totality reproduce and indeed increase the systems of power and discipline developed in modern societies. (PK,59-60) This might be termed the refusal of the totalizing political project that has dominated Western politics from Plato, through Hobbes and Hegel to Marx. Insofar as political theory professed to explain the totality of society and provide universal programmes for its transformation then it can be designated as utopian in the sense of unrealistic and dangerous. The second main reason why Foucault is vehemently anti-utopian is connected to the first in terms of political implication. This is the rejection of any stable conception of human nature and society upon

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20 Id.

which to base utopian desires. This would include a rejection of the notion of a utopian impulse or mentality within human nature. Utopian desires are thus by definition unhistorical because they project a future state of fulfilment based upon some notion of human nature:

> In the nineteenth century, the utopia is concerned with the final decline of time rather than with its morning... when, with the promised evening, the shadow of the *dénouement* comes, the slow erosion or violent eruption of History will cause man's anthropological truth to spring forth in its stony immobility; calendar time will be able to continue; but it will be, as it were, void, for historicity will have been superimposed exactly upon the human essence... *Finitude*, with its truth, is posited in *time*; and *time* is therefore *finite*. The great dream of an end to History is the utopia of causal systems of thought, just as the dream of the world's beginning was the utopia of the classifying systems of thought. (OT,262-3)

The third anti-utopian argument follows from this rejection of a identical human nature and is connected with the difficult practice of freedom within such an anti-essentialist matrix. Rajchman draws the distinction between real and nominal freedom in order to characterise Foucault's own project as something that by definition cannot be "instituted or guaranteed". Formal freedom always exists within contingent historical practices which we are free to analyze, contest and change but our real freedom is what makes this formal freedom possible:

> If utopian thought has been the dream of a world in which our formal freedoms would become real, nominalist history contributes to our real freedom in exposing the nominal nature of our formal ones. Such history is therefore an active challenge to anthropologism. Anthropology entails that we are free because we have a nature that is real or one we must realize;... Our real freedom is found in dissolving or changing the polities that embody our nature, and as such it is asocial or anarchical. No society or polity *could* be based on it, since it lies precisely in the possibility of constant change. Our real freedom is thus political, though it is never finalizable, legislatable, or rooted in our nature. (MFFP,122-3)

Freedom here is not the release from history or the end of dominations but the "revolt through which history may constantly be changed." (MFFP,123) Rajchman's thesis nicely defines an important strand in Foucault's work but one wonders if it does not itself repeat the error of seeking to thematize its own dispersal. After all, the conclusions of a sizable majority have been that Foucault dis-invests us of any hope in the sorts of freedom that Rajchman insists are of Foucault's concern. The freedom of a "permanent questioning of those systems of thought and problematic forms of experience in which we find ourselves" might mean nothing if ultimately the systems and experiences that replace them cannot be said to be of any more value than previous ones, and equally susceptible to the same fate of dispersion. Rajchman points out the logical conclusion to the thrust of Foucault's work, however. Set adrift in the everchanging forms of our constituted experience, liberation can never be a process with an end, nor a possession to be gained but a constant practice applied to the concerns of the present.

Although it is clear that utopian projects in the traditional sense would stifle the fragile mode of being that constitutes Foucault's patient labour of liberty, it does not necessarily mean a total rejection of all the elements and functions associated with the utopian impulse. The functions of utopia are manifold and it would be mere reductionism to subsume its many varieties under the notion of wishful fantasizing with no basis in reality or as serving a compensatory role in societies where there is little hope of changing social and material circumstances.

One of the major functions of utopia that has generated much controversy as to its efficacy is that of a constructive criticism of the present by reference to a hypothetical future. Such a function of

utopian thinking quite obviously depends upon the notion of possible implementation of the projects found within its province and it is this possibility that is often deemed as unrealistic. The Marxist tradition, for example has been predominantly negative in its estimation of utopianism. This criticism is based not so much upon the nature of the ideals and goals projected (although the content of utopianism is often adjudged to be delusions and hence especially amenable to reactionary and fatalistic politics) but upon the process of transformation to be taken in achieving these ideals. What is interesting of course, is the fact that the charge of utopianism is often levelled at Marxism both for its ideals and for its confidence that these will achieved (either combined or singly) by the inevitable dialectic of history or by human will.

It is not only the Marxist tradition that has been vehemently anti-utopian, however. Within colloquial usage the attachment of the epithet 'utopian' is nearly always derogatory in meaning. This is reinforced by the expressly anti-utopian position of much political thought.[21] To this extent, the designation of other people's views as utopian is as much a part of the political struggle as any other activity. In terms of promoting one's own aspirations as realistic and worthy of endeavour it is also an important element for oppositional groups seeking to change society as well as those seeking to retain or increase their power within the status quo.

The function of utopian thinking is thus often portrayed in negative terms and derided as being nothing more than the unfeasible projects of

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21 Karl Popper's The Open Society and its Enemies (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), for example, has been instrumental in creating a common belief in the essential links between utopianism and totalitarian societies.

political factions. This negative judgement can be reversed, however if the concept of possibility is taken in a much broader sense. The recognition that one person's utopia is another's dystopia or fantasy is essentially the recognition that our notions of what is possible within a given society are themselves socially structured and open to contestation. This problematic is an important element in Mannheim's definition of utopia as "situationally transcendent"[22] to the present state of reality, for example. How one is to determine this concept of reality in order to evaluate whether certain ideas and interests are compatible with it leads one into further evaluation and inevitable circularity. As Ricoeur points out, this problem renders unstable Mannheim's further definition of utopia as that which shatters "either partially or wholly, the order of things prevailing at the time"[23] For although utopia is often connected with such a function, this is further dependent upon an evaluation as to its realizability that effects the initial definition. Utopias are precisely the kinds of things that groups protecting the status quo attempt to disqualify because they do indeed challenge the existing order's claim to naturalness. The form that this disqualification takes is invariably that of designating such utopias as unrealizable. Now this designation is precisely a political evaluation that immediately gives the lie to the attempt to define utopia through content alone. What is designated as utopian is as much a product of who is speaking as its content, and thus what is unrealizable for one group with vested interests may be in reality quite feasible. As Mannheim says:

> The very attempt to determine the meaning of the concept 'utopia' shows to what extent every definition in historical thinking depends necessarily upon one's perspective, i.e. it contains within itself the whole system of thought representing the position of the thinker in question and

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22 Karl Mannheim, Ideology and Utopia, p. 193.
23 Ibid. p. 192. See IU, 178.

> especially the political evaluations which lie behind this system of thought.[24]

Thus, designating a particular project as utopian may have little to do with its actual content in a formal sense but a lot to do with how this content is perceived by those who are able to sustain their own interpretations in a field of power struggles.

This can be seen very simply in the way radical ecological alternatives to avert an impending 'eco-catastrophe' are portrayed by capitalist interest groups. Undoubtedly such projects would incur tremendous costs in terms of the social and psychological restructuring that would be required with the dismantling of the whole industrial production system. Nevertheless such a transformation is possible in the minimum sense of the word. Opposition to such alternatives are, however, invariably couched in terms of absolute unfeasibility either because they appear to be a reversal in history to much simpler forms of life or because they contradict human nature which could only desire a greater rather than lesser material life. Radical eco-politics is thus portrayed as utopian in the sense of unfeasible because objective and subjective historical conditions do not allow the fulfilment of its proposals. This unfeasibility does not consist of a contradiction of physical or biological laws, however, which Marcuse argued should be the only sense in which we speak of utopia:

> I believe that we can now speak of utopia only in this latter sense, namely when a project for social change contradicts real laws of nature. Only such a project is utopian in the strict sense, that is beyond history.[25]

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24 Ideology and Utopia, p. 196-7.
25 H. Marcuse, "The End of Utopia" in Ramparts April 1970, pp. 28-34.

Disqualification of the proposals of the ecological movement is easier if its more radical alternatives are condemned as unfeasible by dominant groups. Certain projects are thus excluded from consideration if they can be tainted by association with that which has been classed as utopian. This phenomena permeates the ideological battle over utopia and renders any appeal to realizability in order to judge between competing visions of society a particularly dangerous one.

This is why utopia considered as an expression of desire does not necessarily have to be chained to perceived possibilities of the present. Although, as mentioned above, a principle criticism the Marxist tradition has of utopias is of the means to achieve such alternative visions rather than their actual content, this has been overshadowed by a tendency to regard any speculation about the form and content of the future communist society as liable to be wishful thinking. Levitas points out that Marx and Engels never lost sight of the powerful insights into, and criticisms of, capitalist society generated by the utopian socialists but crucially differed from them on their views of social change:

> the imputed lack of realism applies less to the content of the utopian systems in question than to the models of social change associated with them. Since the primary concern of both Marx and Engels was with fostering such changes, the rejection of utopia is a rejection on the basis of its imputed social function - that of distracting the working classes from more suitable political activity, from 'conscious participation in the historical process revolutionising society before our very eyes'.[26]

Levitas argues that the dominant meaning in Marxism, identifying 'utopian' with 'unrealistic' and encouraging reticence about the

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26 R. Levitas, The Concept of Utopia, p. 57

expression of alternative visions of the future good life, has led to tensions that have been difficult to resolve:

> The ambivalence between the need for a vision to inspire and mobilise, not simply to articulate desire but to express and create hope, and the danger that such a vision may mislead and disable by expressing the wish without the will and power to effect change, lies at the heart of the Marxist response to utopia.[27]

She suggests that this tension has been addressed by a few thinkers within its tradition such as Bloch, Marcuse, and, E. P. Thompson who have argued that "dreaming is an activity necessary to transcending our present sorry state, and that such dreams have both an educative and a transformative function."[28] This activity itself has a historical context in which its urgency may increase during times of little social change. As Anthony Giddens argues: "The 'utopian moments' of critical theory are necessary precisely where what is immanent does not disclose a practical means of reaching those more inclusive goals; and for a critical theory without historical guarantees this situation is likely to be exceedingly common."[29] The education of desire has its dangers but it is a process that radical movements may ignore at their peril.

It is the education of desire that Foucault is suspicious of when he refuses to tie critical thinking to the entertaining of possibilities and alternatives to replace that which is being criticized. One might say that this refusal is expressed in the replacement of the term 'revolution' for that of 'resistance'. This substitution summarizes three main themes of Foucault's own political practice.

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27 Ibid. p. 126.
28 Ibid. p. 127.
29 A. Giddens, The Nation State and Violence (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1985), p. 337

First, instead of grounding political action in a theory with claims to truth, one resists power simply because it always demands such resistance, Foucault argues in HS,1, that "where there is power, there is resistance" and that this resistance is "never in a position of exteriority in relation to power." (HS,1,95)[30] Although this appears to be a deeply fatalistic attitude, it is in fact a simple recognition that there can never be one single revolution that would end all need to question the power relations that emerge after this revolution. Indeed this scenario is precisely the pure form of utopia characterised as something beyond history and geography. It is a situation that orthodox Marxism echoes in its vision of the withering of the state and disappearance of class antagonisms but it is also a scenario hinted at by the 'end of ideology' thesis of writers such as Daniel Bell who sought to deny the presence of major ideological rifts in post-industrial society.[31] Linked to this rejection of the one true and final revolution is a belief in the irreducible plural nature of resistances; there is "no single locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary." (HS,1,195-6) Instead resistance is to be conceived as "distributed in irregular fashion... spread over time and space at varying densities, at times mobilizing groups or individuals in a certain way, inflaming certain points of the body, certain moments in life, certain types of behaviour." (HS,1,96) This whole notion of heterogeneous and fluid resistance is quite clearly adverse to the setting of definite goals for social organization. On a general level this translates into what

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30 Similarly Nietzsche argues in Ecce Homo tr. R. J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), that the condition of every strong nature is that: "It needs resistances, consequently it *seeks* resistances."

31 See Daniel Bell, The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties (New York: Free Press, 1962).

is perceived to be a absence in Foucault's thought, that of a lack of normative grounding for resistance.

Second, although Foucault refuses to suggest alternatives to present power regimes, this does not mean that he believed that resistance was futile. He quite obviously sympathises with certain struggles that either implicitly or explicitly express normative commitments, but it seems that as an academic he is able to distance himself from these commitments because he is not a 'genuine' participant in the conflicts generated by them. Thus, normative grounds are available for those who are involved in specific conflicts of power so long as these do not become frozen into general rules for resistance, but for Foucault they are a dispensable epiphenomena of the actual mechanisms of power and not required in its analysis. In this distance, Foucault appears to imitate precisely those bloodless historians who consider it an imperative not to engage in value judgement. There would seem to be a rift between Foucault's work and the groups it might serve as a 'tool-kit' for fighting the power that they face. Social movements are thus ideally conceived as self-generating and any attempt to provide formative guidance to what might be inchoate and ineffective movements is to be treated with suspicion. This situation is in itself an impossibly high ideal. It ignores the probability that for most of mankind the time and resources available for critical diagnosis of the limits and obstacles that define existence is likely to be very limited. It is in some ways a repudiation of a very important role of the modern intellectual, who despite having little in common with those she might identify with, nevertheless still might have the better opportunities to engage in a coherent understanding of their desires, needs and the methods best available to achieve these. A coherent understanding of desires in order to aid in their coming to be might

also reasonably include a redefinition of these desires in the sense of an education of desire. This would not only seek to enlarge and transform present expectations but also provide the stimulus for transformation that might otherwise have been lacking in merely compensatory imaginings of future society.

Nevertheless, Foucault's disquietude about the relationship between what he designates as "a certain plebeian quality or aspect" in the social body (PK,138) and the modern (university?) intellectual has deeper roots than the divergence of experience. Essentially it rests upon the fact that such a relationship is liable to be dependent upon the 'will to truth', which in modern societies is increasingly subject to a regime of constraints that prevents the emergence of radically different ways of power functioning. Foucault conceives of 'truth' as being "produced and transmitted under the control, dominant if not exclusive, of a few great political and economic apparatuses (university, army, writing, media)." (PK,131-2) It is in this principle that knowledge is linked to specific power regimes that effectively limit the possibilities for subverting these regimes through the production of the true in relation to the false that the particular regime condones that leads to Foucault's most radical and also most fragile hypothesis. That is, the questioning of the politics of truth that currently holds sway. This questioning is vulnerable because it will at times vehemently refuse the necessity to undergo reflection upon its own status, but it also draws its critical penetration because of this Nietzschean contestation of the desire to ground existence. The question is whether such a strategy is pertinent in the political field. At once it calls into question the dominant justifications for political practice and saps the desire to negotiate with this practice in order to produce a practice that would by comparison be preferable. The shaking

of traditional political problematizations functions via a rejection of the totalizations it offers in which other problems are marginalized. Foucault regards this practice "as *concrete and general as possible*" but the truth is that his attempt to "*approach* politics from behind" tends to couch itself in terms of a rupture which is inimical to engaging in a reappropriation of already present strategies.[32] It is all very well expressing a distrust about the success of traditional Leftist political thinking but when this becomes a refusal of connecting these already constituted processes with one's own political ethos then this distrust becomes unlikely to produce the kind of subversion that Foucault intends. Functioning as a negation of politics understood as the winning of power and the ordering and exercise of this power according to grand principles such as justice and liberty, Foucault's micro-politics is in constant danger of remaining a marginalised exercise itself. Politics is precisely the subversion of principles by need, interest and pragmatism.

On one understanding, this marginalisation is the strength of such a politics, because it is precisely the kind of disengagement from the existing political process that enables a recontextualisation of its methods and problematizations in unforeseen and unacknowledged frameworks, such as the relations between sanity and insanity and the questions of sexuality and punishment. On another level, micro-politics consists, not just in an attention to the marginalised subjects of the traditional political process, but in a reevaluation of the analysis of power relations. This is the third main reason for the substitution of resistance for revolution in Foucault's political vocabulary. This is his hypothesis that the power exercised in modern societies since the eighteenth century is of a radically different nature to that described

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[32] See The Foucault Reader, pp. 375-6.

by the theory of sovereignty to be found exemplified in the absolutist states that flourished prior to its emergence. (see PK,103-8) This disciplinary functioning of power according to a "natural rule, a norm", which produces a "society of normalisation", cannot be challenged through an appeal to sovereign rights and definitely cannot be undermined through a revolutionary seizure of the institutions that are more the product than the producer of this disciplinary web. Indeed such a seizure is more likely to result in a expansion of strategies of power. Although Foucault is attentive to the strategy of equating Marxism with the inevitability of the Gulag (PK,134-7) it is clear that he regards Marxist revolutionary movements as forced to "possess equivalent politico-military forces" as the State apparatus in order to achieve their aims. He argues that:

> among all the conditions for avoiding the repetition of the Soviet experience and preventing the revolutionary process from running into the ground, one of the first things that has to be understood is that power isn't localised in the State apparatus and that nothing will be changed if the mechanisms of power that function outside, below and alongside the State apparatuses, on a much more minute and everyday level, are not also changed. (PK,60)

The transformation of these mechanisms is not something that is possible through a simple change in the State apparatus and it is not something that can be initiated from without, rather "it is a matter for those who do the fighting." (PK,62) The question of marginalisation takes on a different light in respect of this understanding of the extremely complex system of power relations in society. For within this analysis, emerging social movements do not require the traditional metanarratives of political action. Rather it is the growth in incredulity toward such metanarratives of revolution embodied in a universal subject that allows the flourishing of other quite different voices in the political field. The

societal or revolutionary rationalization of life can be countered only through a refusal of identification with conceptions of subjectivity that are constituted by these same structures of power. To struggle against social control means to battle against one's prior identification with it and to directly oppose power through a similar power is to risk being defined by that power's structuring of reality. This is why Foucault condones the "ramified, penetrative perception of the present,... that makes it possible to locate lines of weakness, strong points, positions where the instances of power have secured and implanted themselves by a system of organisation dating back over 150 years". (PK,62)[33] All this in the service, not of a coordinated programme of social change but, as an instrument of analysis for those who wish to utilise it in their own struggles.

What is to be asked here is, how can Foucault conceive of such analysis playing a free-floating role in the very power structures it seeks to undermine? Surely on his own premises this is the impossible dream of producing truth in a vacuum. If on the other hand he maintains the much more plausible principle that such analysis is of itself implicated in the structures it challenges, then he must abandon the notion that resistance emerges regardless of critical thought, and therefore, having no necessary connection to it, must be vigilant about the constraints it might put upon the spontaneity of resistance's "plebeian quality". This is the more likely position to be taken if one is to argue that because power is a constitutive element in all social organisation, then resistance must be nomadic and ceaselessly seek to disengage from the solidified forms it might take. Moreover, Foucault's concern about the intellectual's role as a professional counsellor to social movements, whether she be a

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[33] See also PPC, 36-7.

historian, psycho-analyst or sociologist, suggests the possibility of construing resistance and struggle along the lines of authenticity. Foucault cannot at once claim that there is no naturalistic referent which resistance expresses and that resistance is constantly in danger of being corrupted by the programmatic frameworks of the intellectual's own analyses.

(ii) Temporary Identities? The Debt to the Past as a Fiction of the Present

I think that this worry about the professional role of the intellectual in modern society is a legitimate one but also exaggerated by Foucault. The "vain hope of ever acceding to a point of view that could give us access to any complete and definitive knowledge of what may constitute our historical limits" (WE,47) does not extricate the professionalized academic from the risk involved in concrete projections of alternative forms of life. If it does then this is to claim for the intellectual a certain distanciation from life qua intellectual. Simply because one has achieved a reflective distanciation from the attempt to understand one's historicity does not entail that one can adopt an ironic cynicism about projections of alternative forms of life. Indeed the positioning of oneself in the ethos of undecidability is just such a form of life and a traditional one for intellectuals to adopt.

Foucault says that The Order of Things arose out of a passage in Borges that shattered "all the familiar landmarks of my thought - our thought... Breaking up all the ordered surfaces and all the planes with which we are accustomed to tame the wild profusion of existing things" and threatening with collapse "our age-old distinction between the Same

and the Other." (OT,xv) This is of course Borges' famous Chinese encyclopedia with its fantastical yet somehow still familiar taxonomy of animals. Foucault summarizes a major theme of his own thought when he says of this taxonomy:

> In the wonderment of this taxonomy, the thing we apprehend in one great leap, the thing that, by means of the fable, is demonstrated as the exotic charm of another system of thought, is the limitation of our own, the stark impossibility of thinking *that*. (OT,xv)

Foucault wonders if there is a worse kind of disorder than that of the incongruous, that is the disorder of things laid out in sites so different that it is impossible to find a common locus for them. He says:

> *Utopias* afford consolation: although they have no real locality there is nevertheless a fantastic, untroubled region in which they are able to unfold;... *Heterotopias* are disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this *and* that, because they shatter or tangle common names, because they destroy 'syntax' in advance, and not only the syntax with which we construct sentences but also that less apparent syntax which causes words and things....to 'hold together'. This is why utopias permit fables and discourse: they run with the very grain of language and are part of the fundamental dimension of the *fabula*; heterotopias... desiccate speech, stop words in their tracks, contest the very possibility of grammar at its source; they dissolve our myths and sterilize the lyricism of our sentences. (OT,xviii)

The history of order imposed on things is the history of the Same - of that which, for a given culture, is both dispersed and related, therefore to be distinguished by kinds and to be collected together into identities. Foucault finally argues that:

> In attempting to uncover the deepest strata of Western culture, I am restoring to our silent and apparently immobile soil its rifts, its instability, its flaws; and it is the same ground that is once more stirring under our feet. (OT,xxiv)

Ricoeur's concern with tradition and utopia in volume three of Time and Narrative, is it would seem, a far cry from these concerns of Foucault. Whereas Ricoeur is concerned to rescue tradition and utopia as

categories of thought that can orientate thinking about emancipation within the finitude of historicity, Foucault is at pains to distance his own thinking from such traditional concepts. Heterotopias dissolve the myths of identity and order and are fundamentally disruptive of language. It is in the hidden interests of this disruption that I have sought to begin an opening out of Foucault's work onto the terrain of utopia.

As we have seen, Ricoeur defines utopia in relation to ideology. Utopia consists of a shattering of existing relations and identities as opposed to ideology's preeminent role of preserving identity and contributing to the integration of groups and cultures across time and space. In this schema, the pejorative senses of ideology and utopia are displaced through an analysis of attempts to position ideology in a subordinate relation to scientific or critical knowledge purified of the ideological. We have seen that Foucault refuses the possibility of such knowledge too. Ricoeur's positive evaluation of utopia as the shatterer of existing relations because it is noncongruent with those relations would only appear to Foucault as an over-inflation of the productive imagination. Such an emphasis upon utopia will only serve to entangle one more in the discontents of the present. Curiously this is to take a deeply orthodox Marxist view of utopia in which it is associated with the unrealizable and the fantastical. We have seen how Foucault's analyses pose questions to this orthodoxy in areas such as power relations and history so it is surprising that he should dismiss the possible ruptural effects of utopian thinking so rapidly. This we have linked to his more fundamental worry about the intellectual projecting alternative forms of life and offering solutions to problems and struggles in the present. But what might we ask is the attempt to restore to our "silent and

apparently immobile soil its rifts, its instability, its flaws" if not the advocation of a form of life and one constituted primarily in terms of its refusal of the positive function of ideology or tradition. Foucault does not seek to ground forms of life with philosophical principles it is true. Yet there is implicitly a call to a changed relationship to all forms of life through the ceaseless revelation of their constituted nature and limited configurations. This is not a simple substitution of ordinary forms of life for the philosophical form, but it might as well be in terms of the relationship it takes up with those ordinary forms.[34]

There is in short, no sense of participation in Foucault's analyses, even though he is writing from within the constellation of the present. Participation in the sense that the impetus of his work; its drive to dispersion and desire to transgress any temporary identities that might form in its reception, is peculiarly recalcitrant to being used by ordinary social actors. Moreover, this will to dispersion is itself a utopian *hubris* if its strategy is applied as a transcendental principle of social organisation. One might applaud the intellectual honesty that is exhibited in the refusal of systematicity and questioning of traditional political frameworks but ultimately one should ask what is the purpose behind such honesty?

If, as I have argued, Foucault's work cannot claim a complete break from the tradition of critical theories of society, then the purpose can only be that of a more enlightened sense of freedom.[35] It is to show people

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[34] This is for example a conclusion that can be drawn from the thrust of Heidegger's work in its disclosure of the openings and hence closures that every epoch of Being brings. See J. D. Caputo, Radical Hermeneutics.

[35] Ironically freedom is what many commentators have seen as missing in Foucault's histories. Clifford Geertz sees Discipline and Punish, for example, as a "kind of Whig history in reverse - a history, in spite of itself, of the rise of Unfreedom." New York Review of Books, January 26, E1978.

that they are actually much freer than they think they are. This freedom would presumably be at its 'purest' when it is practised as a constant detachment from constituted experience; when in fact one is not only shown that their experience is constituted but is able to live the life of the intellectual qua Foucault and ceaselessly question the limits of one's experience. Now I have characterised this as a deeply utopian principle itself despite its obvious attractions. It is all very well characterizing ordinary experience as just one form of theoretical penetration of the world with no less claim to status than the professional thinker, whether she be historian, sociologist, philosopher or psychologist. It is another to claim that the practise of freedom is really constituted through the constant exploration of ones thoughts and its limit. This in itself merely repeats the importation of theory into ordinary life that Foucault is so suspicious of. Unless the "freedom of philosophy" can be genuinely translated into the world from which it arises then it is itself susceptible to the charge of unrealizable utopianism. The tendency towards a transgressive philosophy of the limit sits therefore in an uneasy relationship with the desire to show people that they are actually freer than they think. Being freer for more freedom cannot be the ultimate end of social life conceived of as always already the temporary establishment of identities, unities and narratives.

Once one places Foucault's work within this light then it becomes much less incongruous to compare it with the thought of philosophical hermeneutics. In particular, Foucault's concern to avoid the Enlightenment "blackmail" of the necessity for normative foundations in order to practise critique can be reassessed as comparable to the hermeneutical concern with the finite and always already situated nature of social life. The attempts to come to terms with this situatedness are

most typically summed up by Gadamer's notion of consciousness being exposed to the efficacity of history (*Wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein*),[36] in which there is much more an emphasis upon Being than consciousness. This is why the approach of a philosophical hermeneutics which understands reality as always already constituted symbolically through language and takes this finitude as the starting point for reflection cannot be so easily dismissed. In this sense, Ricoeur's emphasis upon the dialectic between ideology and utopia can be seen as just one more refiguration of an already symbolically structured praxis. It is one more narrative fiction added to the primary interpretation or figuration of human action and testifies to his belief that narrative is a redefining of what is already defined, a reinterpretation of what is already interpreted. Given the long tradition of ideology and science the couplet ideology/utopia serves to both integrate and explode the aims of the prior distinction.

Parallelling the positive functions of utopian politics, Ricoeur argues that literature has the capacity to put our quotidian existence into question by supplementing this primary representation of the social with its narrative representation. They both effect a metaphorization of the real, a creation of new meaning. We might say that this too is the result of Foucault's radical reinterpretations of power and knowledge relations, of history, and of the self. We think "more honestly" after Foucault, but not necessarily differently.[37]

Ricoeur insists upon the mutual interweaving of narrative fiction and history insofar as they both refer to a fundamental feature of our

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36 See H. G. Gadamer, Truth and Method, 267 ff.
37 See G. Gillan's conclusion in 'Foucault's Philosophy' in The Final Foucault, Philosophy and Social Criticism, no. 2-3, 1987.

individual and social existence, identified by the notion of historicity, which expresses the fundamental and radical fact that we make history, are embedded in history and are temporal beings. Both narrative forms contribute to the description and redescription of our historical condition, the relation between narrativity and historicity.

Thus, there is an intricate and inextricable connection between narrating history and actually being in history, between writing history and being historical. The form of life to which narrative discourse belongs is our historical condition itself and there is more fiction in historical narratives than the positivist conception allows. For historicity comes to language only in the process of telling it and yet we belong to history before this telling or writing in such a way that the act of narrating itself becomes caught up in the actual reality that is told. To follow Gadamer, the history we recount or write belongs to the "effective history" of the things that have happened; to the "*Wirkungsgeschichte*" of historicity itself. This applies especially to the work of Foucault which partakes and contributes to the great historical event of the West's loss of centre and the consequent loss of universal History. An understanding of Foucault's work in terms of Ricoeur's notion of refiguration becomes even more plausible when we consider one of his own understandings of his texts:

> I am well aware that I have never written anything but fictions. I do not mean to say, however, that truth is therefore absent. It seems to me that the possibility exists for fiction to function in truth, for a fictional discourse to induce effects of truth, and for bringing it about that a true discourse engenders or 'manufactures' something that does not as yet exist, that is, 'fictions' it. One 'fictions' history on the basis of a political reality that makes it true, one 'fictions' a politics not yet in existence on the basis of a historical truth. (PK,193)

When one considers the nature of the politics that is to be fashioned here from a "historical truth" then one is led to the conclusion that, as with Ricoeur, this truth is to be the recovery of the hitherto repressed and slaughtered possibilities of history. In more familiar terms, the victims of history. This is certainly the conclusion to be drawn from Foucault's linkage of genealogy with the "claims to attention of local, discontinuous, disqualified, illegitimate knowledges" in its concern for "the painstaking rediscovery of struggles together with the rude memory of their conflicts."(PK,83)

The idea of repaying a due to the past and to the people of the past is one that Ricoeur stresses as a guiding principle in the differentiation of fiction and history. The inevitable reference to the ideal of a certain correspondence between historical narratives and what really happened finds its impetus in this principle. Even though historical narratives are necessarily refigurations of the course of events narrated, historians by instinct would like their constructions to be re-constructions. Ricoeur argues that this desire to do justice to the past, to render it 'as it was', implies on the ethical plane that we have an unpaid debt to it, we seek to render its due to what is and to what once was.

This indebtedness comes to the fore most vividly in histories that attempt to recount the story of the victims of history. That is of those people and events which have been ignored or lost to hitherto existing histories. It is profoundly un-Nietzschean, both in the status given to the notion of debt to the past and of the preeminent connection of this debt to the claim of the victims of history. Genealogy tacitly gains its normative and critical force from its connection with just such a notion of debt towards the marginalized, and repressed of history.

Ricoeur argues that in relation to the commemoration of the great founding events of communities that are celebrated and remembered principally for their integrative function, the ultimate ethical motivation for the history of victims is driven by horror which isolates events by making them incomparable and unique and thus never to be forgotten. It is in this sense that the Holocaust has been considered a negative revelation, an Anti-Sinai. (TN,3,187) Explanation binds historical phenomena together whereas horror singularizes them, but Ricoeur does not wish to depict these two modes of understanding as alternatives. Rather, he argues, each enhances the other. The more we explain in historical terms, the more indignant we become; the more we are struck by the horror of events, the more we seek to understand them.

It is in this sense that we can understand the ethical interests which animate Foucault's historical research. There is a tremendous underlying horror in the charting of the development of the carceral matrix or the moral division between madness and sanity that makes such texts so arresting. This is the reason why his genealogical approach can be seen as consisting of identifying current problematizations, describing with some detachment how these situations arose, and at the same time, inciting reflection and concern about the pervasive and insidious dangers of current social forms. This is also why genealogy is a product of shared concerns and is driven ultimately by the historian's interest in 'facts' understood as the rendering of these present concerns their due. Here the function of the intellectual is one of identifying the specific forms and specific interrelationships which truth and power have taken in our history. If the aim is not to denounce power *per se*, nor to propound truth, but to use his analysis to produce a grid of intelligibility for understanding the specific dangers that each specific

type of power/knowledge produces, then this is in turn anchored in an interest in communication. As Ricoeur argues, this interest expresses the situation of the historian as a member belonging to the field which she studies. Consequently any procedure of objectification, distanciation, suspicion, or dispersion that makes historiography a form of critical research is in the service of this interest in communication.

This is why I have argued that the tendency to de-structure the present in a way that privileges the necessity of dispersion over any finite identities sits uneasily with the ethical thrust of Foucault's genealogies. Not only is the privileging of fragmentary and dispersive selves and political groupings utopian (in the traditional transcendental sense) in its desire, but it is also contrary to the ethical aims of a historiography that seeks to articulate the hidden and subjected struggles and resistances behind existing histories. Ricoeur's emphasis upon the narrative possibilities of human existence is thus a timely reminder of the dangerous tendency towards dismissing such possibilities as nostalgic fictions concerned with throwing a skein of order over an essentially disordered reality and with arresting the play of interpretation in dangerous presences and myths of identity. Nothing in this emphasis leads one to conclude that narration is to contribute to fixed identities or schemas for action. The search for narrative continuity is not just nostalgic illusion but a contestation of the spread of uni-dimensionality in society. The history of the oppressed and inarticulate demands to be told precisely because it renders fissile the apparent permanence of cultural identities. Narrative selection focusing on the plot of suffering reverses the normal narrative ordering of history, and new sets of events and relations take precedence. This applies equally with Foucault's anonymous shiftings of power-knowledge

as it does with the relations of labour and production in Marxism. Narration that orders the past is not necessarily conservative closure to what is new.

Moreover, by trying to put order on our past, by retelling and recounting what has been, we acquire an identity and this applies equally to Foucault's principles of rupture and dispersive constitution in that they contribute to the narration of the present as one of fractured identities which is nonetheless subject to the danger of acquiring a privilege of its own. One might ask with Ricoeur, whether the creative process of reinterpretation can operate if narrative continuity is completely broken? One must remain critical lest one reduces even an initial liberating anti-narrativism to another reified version of events.

Reinhart Koselleck has drawn attention to the fact that the modern age is characterized by a contracting of the space of experience, which makes the past seem ever more distant, and also an increasing gap between our "space of experience" and our "horizon of expectation".[38] The dream of a reconciled humanity constantly withdraws and we are ever more uncertain of its realization. The task becomes a utopia where our horizon of expectation withdraws from us faster than we can advance toward it. This experience of modernity can be seen as the

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[38] See R. Kosselleck, Futures Past, pp. 267-88. Kosselleck believes that what is constitutive of individuals and societies is how they conceive of their own temporality and in particular their future. He thus seeks a history of the conceptions of historical time. One might compare Hans Blumenberg's defense of modernity's self conception in relation to Kosselleck's portrayal of *Neuzeit's* emphasis upon the acceleration of progress. Blumenberg's celebration of theoretical curiousity which serves a "rationality of humane consideration" is a important rehabilitation of human self-assertion in the context of the attack upon the principles that drove modern science to develop. Here, the symbol of an unfinished world serves the purpose of promoting ethical-epistemological moderation in the present and surely influenced Habermas' notion of modernity as a unfinished project. See The Legitimacy of the Modern Age, tr. by R. M. Wallace (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1983).

basis for Foucault's reflections upon the undesirability of presenting a project of rational grounds or prescriptive policies with a political intent. The present in this sense is caught between the two disappering horizons of the surpassed past and a withdrawing endpoint and more and more sees itself as one of 'crisis'. Ricoeur argues for the universalism of Koselleck's categories which is "assured" by their "permanent ethical and political implications". (TN,3,214) For Ricoeur, to admit that there is no history that is not constituted through the experiences and the expectations of active and suffering human beings, is to imply that the tension between the horizon of expectation and the space of experience has to be preserved if there is to be any history at all.

The tension characteristic of modernity, between expectations that distance themselves from all prior experience, is precisely when modernity recognizes itself as a new time. It also inaugurates the possibility of the idea of progress still destined to a better future being abandoned for the idea of utopia with no connection to acquired experience. With such utopias the tension of modernity becomes a schism. The ethical and political task, according to Ricoeur, is to prevent the tension between these two poles of thinking about history from becoming a schism. We must resist the seduction of utopian expectations insofar as they prevent the formulation of practical paths to the ideals they postulate. It is imperative to keep our horizon of expectation from running away from us by connecting it to the present by means of a series of intermediary projects. Along with this caution, however, we must also resist the narrowing of the space of experience.[39] This is

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39 See Richard Kearney, "Between Tradition and Utopia: The Hermeneutical Problem of Myth", in On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation, ed. David Wood (London: Routledge, 1991), for a discussion of this tension and its productive creativity.

precisely the point where the struggle against the tendency to view the past as done and unchangeable becomes ethically necessary. Thus, we have to re-open the past, re-enable its unaccomplished, "even slaughtered", possibilities in order to prevent our experience from becoming determinate. In short we have to make our expectations more determinate and our experience less so.[40] These are two sides of one task. Only determinate expectations can have the retroactive effect on the past of revealing it as a living tradition. "It is in this way that our critical meditation on the future calls for the complement of a similar meditation on the past". (TN,3,216)

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[40] Ricoeur's sensitivity to the possibility of the critical rupture of utopia sliding into the dangerously schizophrenic utopian discourse which projects a static future without ever producing the conditions of its realization is a problem that Boris Frankel engages in his study of post-industrial utopias. The Post-Industrial Utopians (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987) Frankel seeks a dialogue between the economic strength and experiences of the labour movement and the eco-feminist and eco-pacifist critiques of existing societies in order to fuse the strengths of both. At the same time, he shares the Marxist ambivalence towards utopian thought in that no matter how desirable post-industrial movements may be, they remain fantasy unless they are linked to concrete plans of action and organization. Frankel is not simply dismissive of the utopian elements of new social movements. It would be defeatist to ignore their positive elements and even their theoretical and practical weaknesses are invaluable in forcing us to find more plausible alternatives and strategies. He concludes that politics is about the "hard grind" and 'the art of the possible' and yet without the imaginative ideas of people, politics becomes nothing more that the myopic, self-justifying and often *cynical* hard grind. If earlier generations had not dared to think the impossible, we would not have achieved much that is now taken for granted. Yet if the alternatives are not feasible, all the passion in the world will go tragically astray.

The problem is that even if we find such alternatives unfeasible this still does not refute the call for radical change. Indeed it might be argued that subjecting such alternatives to criteria of feasibility based on the existing system and values is to miss their point altogether. This is especially true of criticism based upon the value of maintaining existing economic production in capitalist countries. How are we to judge genuine radical alternatives if the criteria for their success does not exist in present societies? The notion of feasibility is a very broad and vague term unless it is circumscribed by actual existing notions of economic and social viability, but to so define feasibility is to limit radical alternatives in the first place.

As Ricoeur argues, it is "not that we are without utopia but we are without paths to utopia."[41] The deflation of utopia is a necessary event in social and political thought, but there is still a place for the utopian discourse of rupture which remains critical of the powers that be out of a fidelity to an 'elsewhere', to a society that is not yet. This fidelity to an 'elsewhere' is necessarily a dangerous discourse insofar as it is always liable to a relinquishing of present tasks in the name of the liberation to come. However, with and against Foucault's ultra-caution about such discourse, we might say that everything is dangerous but not all of the time. This is to say that, even though historiography might find its justification in the present through the reactualization of its dispersive capacities, this cannot remain its only ambition. Thus, we might say, following Ricoeur, that historiographies practised as a "symbolic confirmation of the past" and as a "symbolic opening towards the future are complementary".[42]

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41 Paul Ricoeur, "The Creativity of Language" an interview with Richard Kearney, in Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinker: The Phenomenological Heritage (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 31.
42 Ibid. p. 30.

Concluding Remarks

To propose a particular reading of Foucault's work in terms of its effect upon the time of action as conceived in the notion of historical inauguration is to some extent to recuperate his work into an ordinary understanding of politics and time. Ultimately I think this can be justified by the limitation of his own productive transgressions. These are specifically: the reversal of continuous, memorative historiography to that of a dispersive, effective genealogy concerned with intervention in the present and the making of differences; the reversal of the problem of the good life from a mode of a universal ethos to that of an aesthetics of existence concerned with the transformations and creation of the self; and the reversal of a critique of social relations as a normative practice to that of a ceaseless transgression oriented around the notion of a resistance of power wherever it may form. I hope to have indicated the tensions that such reversals entail. That they are productive tensions is, however, an important element in an understanding of their limits. These limits are not to be understood as dialectical moments to be recuperated in a broader model of social reason and action but as the points where work conceived in the present initiates its penetrative capacities. This is particularly pertinent in the analysis of the 'present' as a metaphysically loaded term. In this sense, Foucault's reevaluation of historiography is part of the long philosophical reinterpretation of the ordinary understanding of time. Similarly his ethics of dispersion and questioning of the ordinary notion of power as repressive and hence freedom as emancipatory from such power are radical reinterpretations of ordinary understanding. Foucault's own vision of the world is never ethically neutral and indeed could not hope to be so. Even the stoical implications of his models of power are re-invested with the passionate call for the difficult and ceaseless practise of disengagement and recreation.

Contrary to the notion that philosophy leaves everything as it is, Foucault's work demands of the reader an immense reorientation of one's relationship to existence and in particular the historicity of existence. I have argued that this itself cannot be insulated from the charge of a certain utopianism. Despite the productivity of its strategic interventions, the drive to dispersion is simply to great a call on the ordinary understanding of history and cannot re-occupy the entirety of its field. Moreover, Foucault's privileging of the 'Other' is shot through with a normative stress upon the disenfranchised, the repressed and the defeated of history in much the same way that Ricoeur orientates his rather more traditional understanding of the ethical limits of historiography. It is too simple to present this recovery of the 'Other' as an endless task in historiography. For one, this would merely be to mimic the endless epistemological rectification of traditional historiography which seeks to expand indefinitely the historical field. It is the real force of Foucault's work to have shown the misguidedness of this desire both politically and epistemologically. The insertion of the historical enquirer in a specific constellation of power relations simply precludes the notion of an ever expanding understanding of history. Following Nietzsche, a certain active forgetfulness is called for in order to practise a history of the present. This too, is the conclusion of an hermeneutics of historical consciousness, stressing as it does the always already finite temporal situation as the horizon of the interpreter within which understanding proceeds. The concrete disclosure of possibilities always forecloses others. It is this finite apprehension that leads to Ricoeur's stress on the necessity of a "wager" on a certain set of values and the "risking of our whole life on them" in expectation of achieving a

"better life, to see and to understand things better than others."[1] With Foucault the wager seems to be truly a trial between different ways of understanding but with none of Ricoeur's faith in the better life that grounds the appeal to a risking of one's life.

This, I have argued is misjudge the force of Foucault's own reevaluations, which far from being ethically neutral, contribute to a philosophy of risk which demands of the reader.[2] It is the status of this demand that ultimately enables the narrative recuperation of Foucault's work into the ethical concerns of critical theory and philosophical hermeneutics. Specifically it is in the mutual interplay between the production of his texts and its subject matter: whether this be the techniques of objectification and subjectification of subjects; power-knowledge relations; or anonymous discourse analysis, that these ethical concerns are at their most traditional. Following Giddens' characterisation of the "double hermeneutic" in social theory, in which the second order concepts of the social theorist are always prone to appropriation by lay actors as first order concepts regardless of their original intentions, we might say that Foucault's own theories (and in particular that of the danger of the universal intellectual pronouncing on social and moral problems and serving as an arbiter of struggle) are themselves peculiarly prone to incorporation in the universe of meaning and action of lay actors. The fact that reflection on social processes (even if this is aimed at a dissolution of the categories the 'social' and the 'subject', or of 'continuous history') necessarily becomes entangled

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1 P. Ricoeur, Lectures on Ideology and Utopia, p. 312.

2 "I dream of the intellectual who destroys evidence and generalities.... who, wherever he moves, contributes to posing the question of knowing whether the revolution is worth the trouble and what kind, it being understood that the question can be answered only by those who are willing to risk their lives to bring it about." (PPC,124)

in the world it intervenes in, means that the attempt to purify reflection from that world is a deeply misguided desire. This, I would argue, is especially the case with a genealogy that attempts to uproot all identities in the service of that which is marginalized, and a theory of power that tends towards an uprooting of projective action.[3] That Foucault's concrete work makes implicit choices for powers is both and indication of the impossibility of understanding without evaluating and of the importance of the imaginative refiguration of models for resistance which he was particularly concerned with promoting. The history of the effects of Foucault's work in this sense, is a prime exemplar of his dictum in The Order of Things that "thought cannot help but liberate and enslave."

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[3] Ricoeur articulates this situation well: "This process of suspicion which started several centuries ago has already changed us. We are more cautious about our beliefs, sometimes even to the point of lacking courage; we profess to be only critical and not committed. I would say that people are now more paraylzed than blind."

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